PC PowerPlay

PC GAMES & TECHNOLOGY 100% AUSTRALIAN

www.pcpowerplay.com.au

SPECIAL EDITION

5 YEARS ~ OF ~ GAMING

The events, the games, the history! Huge 12 page retrospective

THE DEFINITIVE REVIEW

BLACK & WHITE

Is this really the best game ever?

POWERTEST

CD WRITERS

12 CD Burners reviewed and rated

FIRST REVIEW

TRIBES 2

Are you ready to go to war?

REVIEWED!

- SERIOUS SAM
- CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING
- SUDDEN STRIKE
- F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP
- NASCAR RACING 4
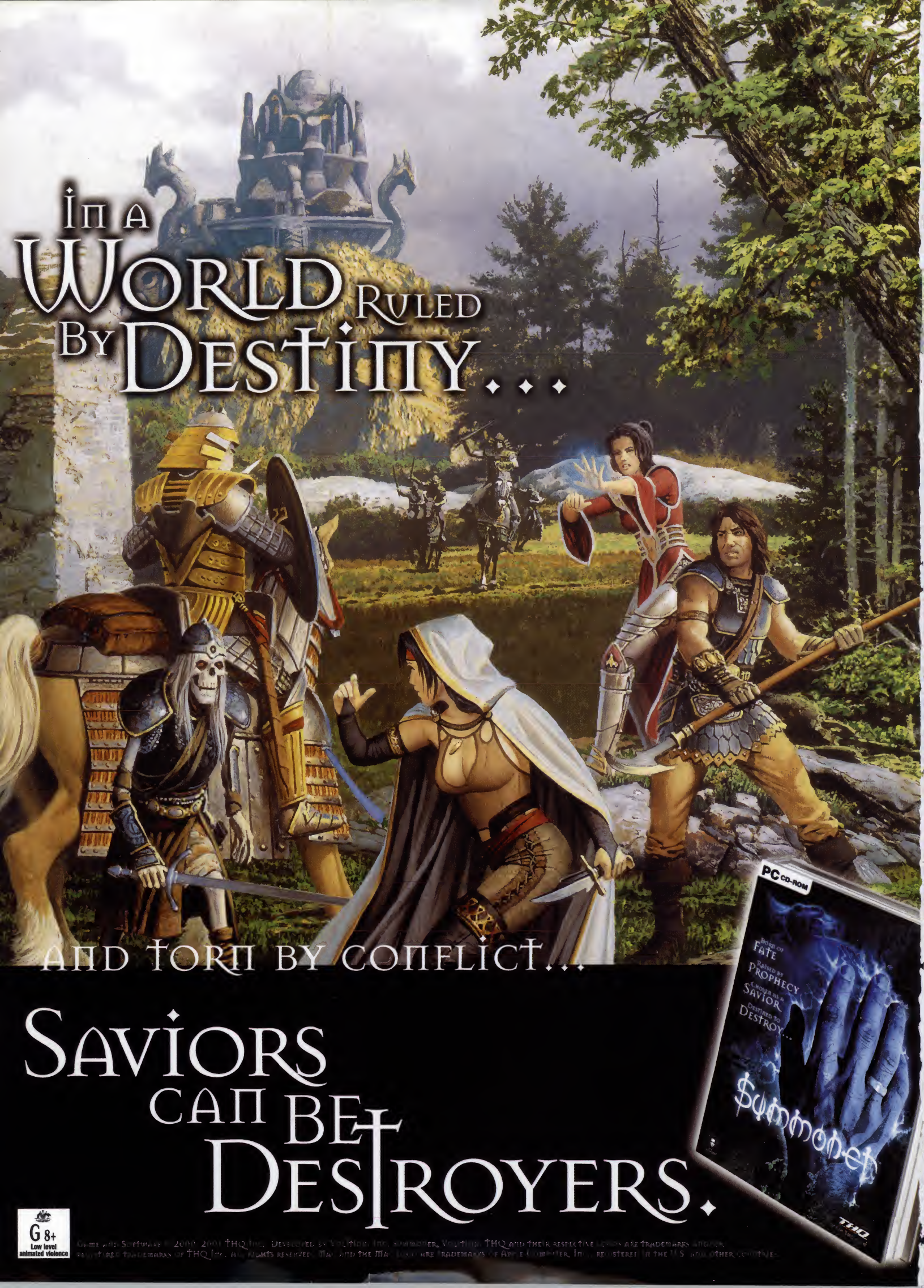- BATTLE FOR NABOO

NO CDs?
Please ask your newsagent

IN A WORLD RULED BY DESTINY...

AND TORN BY CONFLICT...

SAVIORS CAN BE DESTROYERS.
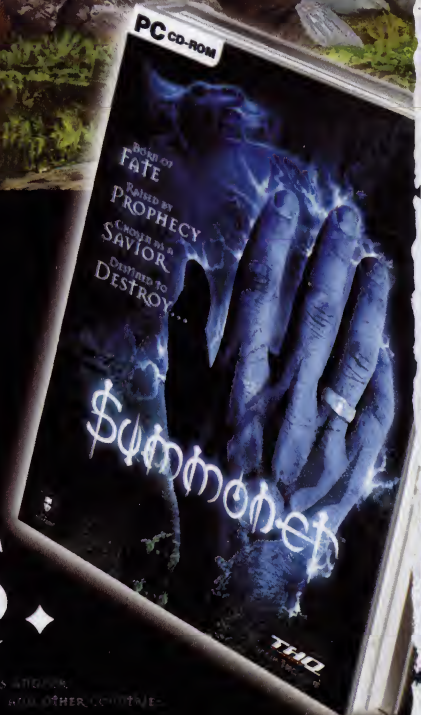
PC CD-ROM

BORN OF FATE
RAISED BY PROPHECY
CHOSEN AS A SAVIOR
DESTINED TO DESTROY...

Summoner

To Ensure Our Tracks 99.9% Accurate.
Every Curve Is Tried an
The Only Racing Game (

"F1 Championship is the Ferrari of F1 sims."
- 90%, PCPowerplay

54/101.1_2005/11.1
33/333.9_1029/33.6
58/112.3_5550/26.7
25/337.5_2205/77.3
98/254.9_2508/25.1
33/773.9_2050/77.7
33/110.2_1250/77.5
69/258.9_

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THE HISTORY OF PC POWERPLAY
IS THE HISTORY OF PC GAMES

CD PowerPlay CD#60 2CDs.
1.2GIGS • 15 DEMOS

PLAYABLE DEMO!
BATTLE FOR NABOO It's Star Wars

HUGE DEMO!
NASCAR 4 Left, left, left...

MASSIVE DEMO!
SUDDEN STRIKE World War II strategy

ENORMOUS DEMO!
F1 RACING Better than GP3?

DESPERADOS See you at High Noon

GIANTS Experience the most beautiful game ever made!

SUMMONER DISCOVER A NEW GENERATION OF ROLEPLAYING ADVENTURE

PC PowerPlay

MAY 2001 ISSUE 60

40 Gadgets Special
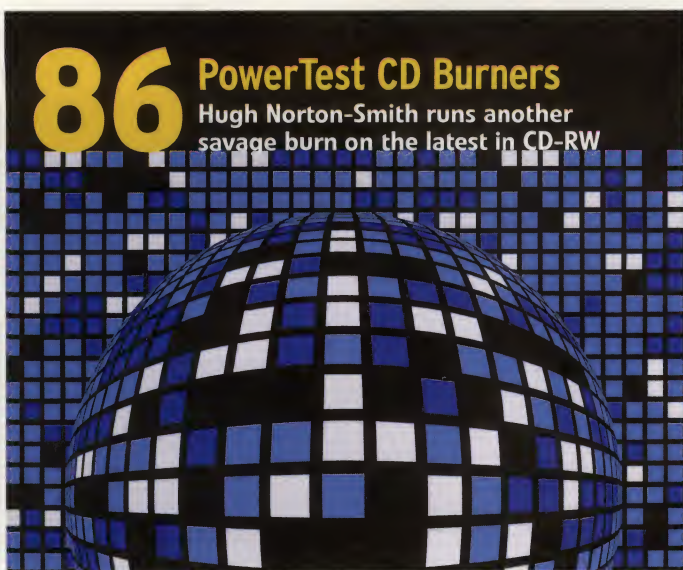It's our birthday and these are the presents we wish you'd bought us

60 Black & White
Awesome in scope, anal in detail, it's finally here!

86 PowerTest CD Burners
Hugh Norton-Smith runs another savage burn on the latest in CD-RW

IT'S OUR BIRTHDAY!

DAVID WILDGOOSE

Five years ago I was writing for some obscure magazine...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Classical Gas on the twelve-string guitar while spinning on my head and singing 'I am the very model of a modern major general'. Also Planescape Torment.

Welcome to the 60th edition of PC PowerPlay. It's our fifth birthday, in case you didn't know. Five years since Ben Mansill first put finger to keyboard with the intent of establishing Australia's (and New Zealand's) best and now only PC games magazine. Five years in which the industry has scaled dizzy heights, endured controversy, matured considerably in some ways while regressing in others, and finally seems to be finding its feet.

Five years of gaming is an awful long time. PC PowerPlay has seen three editors, four designers, three deputy editors, four staff writers, one tech editor, two publishers, and a host of freelancers pass through the office for varying lengths of time, each one contributing to the creation of the magazine you now hold in your hands. Cheers to each and every one of you!

And of course we would never have made it this far if not for the thousands upon thousands of dedicated and discerning readers purchasing the mag each month. Your taste is impeccable and I thank you for it.
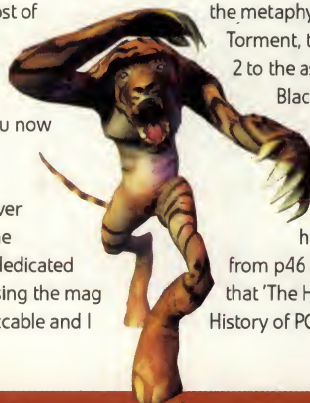
It's remarkable to think how far this industry has travelled in the past half-decade. When PCPP launched, the big games were Quake, Duke Nukem 3D, Civilization 2 and Command & Conquer. Today, there's Quake 3, Duke Nukem Forever, Civilization 3 and Red Alert 2. Erm...

No, what I meant to say was, five years ago the best games were simple, uncomplicated; they each provided one type of experience and did it damn well. Who then could have predicted the breadth of experiences that games have to offer in 2001? From the all-action thrills of Half-Life to the immersive reality of Deus Ex, the strategic and tactical depth of Age of Empires 2 and Shogun to the metaphysical meditation of Planescape: Torment, the future war simulation of Tribes 2 to the astonishing artificial lifeforms of Black & White, the games of today are vastly more sophisticated than their primitive ancestors.

In just five years, PC games have grown up. PC PowerPlay has grown with the industry. So, from p46 we present compelling evidence that 'The History of PC PowerPlay is the History of PC Games'...

david@next.com.au

THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

This month we ask 'Where were *you* five years ago?'

ANTHONY FORDHAM
On a tap-dancing tour of the Benelux Countries
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Pass the Parcel

HUGH NORTON-SMITH
Darkest Africa, searching for the source of the Nile
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Pass the Pigs

DANIEL STAINES
Sleeping with the Secretary General of the United Nations
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Pass the Applesauce

HARRY MARAGOS
I was in Imports and Exports. If you know what I mean
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Pass

CHANTAL BAIRLE
Lost in a haze of bliss. Hah!
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Monopoly

JOHN DEWHURST
Running a home for deranged monkeys. Want to see my scar?
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Spank the Monkey

JAMES COTTEE
I don't like to say. But it was very sticky
WHAT I'M PLAYING
UNIVAC Tic-Tac-Toe

TIMOTHY C. BEST
Investing in pyramid schemes and snorting AJAX
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Practical jokes

CHRISTIAN READ
Mixing ink at a printery. No really...
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Freedom Force

RYAN HOVINGH
Asleep in bed. My own bed. No really...
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Daikatana

GARETH JONES
I was the blue guy in that cold tablet commerical
WHAT I'M PLAYING
CM 00/01

BRETT ROBINSON
I was the orange guy in that cold tablet commerical
WHAT I'M PLAYING
Hamlet

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EAX
DOLBY DIGITAL

Warrior Kings

MORE MEDIEVAL BATTLING GOODNESS FROM SIERRA. HALBERDS FRONT!

Look carefully and you'll see a family of bunnies

Hey! Do any of you guys know how to Madison?

The Wicker Man Watches. Look out Christopher Lee

Pikes akimbo

Instead of choosing a side at the outset, you are cast as Artos: a disposed nobleman intent on bringing down an evil Empire. Developing according to the choices made by players, he is neither definitely good nor definitely evil, but can be either or both, depending on which decisions you make and which paths you take. This is refreshingly original and, hopefully, will be a much needed shot in the arm for certain established companies to spice up in the originality department. No stupid 'here is a building, blow it up and I will tell you to blow up another one when you are done' FMV sequences are to be found in Warrior Kings.

Battle, as mentioned, is a strictly Medieval affair and, as such, formations play a major role in the way war is played out. One can not simply gather large amounts of their favourite unit and go bum-rushing the nearest castle. It is necessary to strategically plot a course of action and set your army into workable formations before going off to war. What this means, basically, is that the largest number of fighters will not always win the day,

as strategy and formation utilization is tantamount.

Scabbards!

As can be seen from the snaps, the games 3D Shogun-esque graphical presentation is, for want of a better term, darn pretty. We have been assured by Black Cactus that the 3D visuals and terrain will have a tangible strategic effect on gameplay and the topography of disputed areas is always a central strategic concern. Resource management, as this stage, is highly reminiscent of Warcraft, with 3 separate resources that have to be employed when undertaking a variety of different tasks. What's interesting about it, however, is that players must collect different types of resources according to economic 'boom' periods in particular areas of production.

However, the fact that Warrior Kings looks to have a competent resource management system is but a minor plus when compared to all the other positives mentioned in this first-look. What we have here is a title that is shaping up to be a cross between Shogun, Warcraft and Age of Empires- with just a dash of Deus Ex to boot. Hell, let's get Medieval.

Daniel Staines

Warrior Kings, being developed by Black Cactus and published by Sierra, is a Real Time Strategy game taking place in a realm of pure fantasy in which Medieval warfare – in the true sense of the term – is rife. Men dressed in big shiny suits with smarmy accents chop each other up with alarming regularity here. However, contrary to the standard RTS tradition, the reasons for this continual slaughter are presented to the player via what is – way hey! – actually an interesting and involving story.

WHY WARRIOR KINGS DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

| ◼ Immersive, and progressive non-linear story | ◼ Focus on tactics instead of 'rush and ask questions later' | ◼ Superb visuals reminiscent of Shogun: Total War | ◼ Cross between Shogun, AoE and Warcraft - what more? |

Arx

RETURN TO THE UNDERWORLD

Looking Glass fans take note: this is essentially Underworld 3

Open up and say, "Die foul beast!"
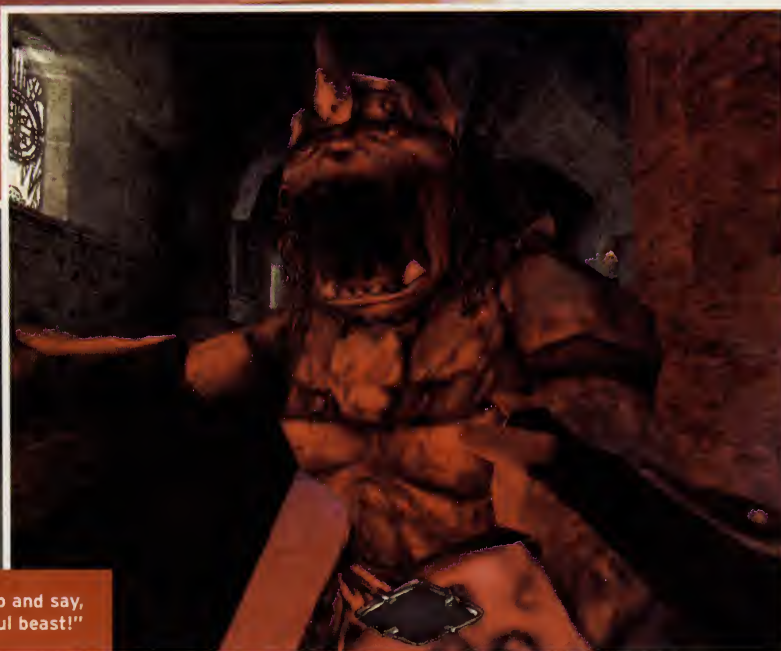
A disembodied third hand is a great thing to have

There is nothing more reviled in this office than dwarves. Stinkin' dwarves, with a few notable exceptions, have appeared in every stinkin' RPG ever since the stinkin' genre was invented – and they're always exceptionally annoying, self righteous little twats.

Here's a hint, game developers: if you want us to penalise your game by 10% before we even play it, put a dwarf in it. If you want an extra 5% knocked off, give him a red beard and an axe. However, if you'd actually like a good score on your game, then take a hint from Arkane Studios and allow us to kill dwarves. As many dwarves as we'd like.

No love of the little people

That's right, Arx, the upcoming RPG offspring of Arkane, will be full of copious dwarf killing... at least in these offices, anyway. See, Arx isn't specifically about murdering vertically-impaired beer swillers, but one can play it

that way if one so desires. In fact, one can play it *any way one likes*.

In what could be described as the first in a new wave of Deus Ex inspired 'immersive reality simulations', Arx combines a gritty, dank world of pure medieval fantasy with utterly free-form, near limitless gameplay. Ever been to a shop in an RPG and been charged through the nose for a piddling piece of stick weaponry by a grasping, capricious shopkeeper? Ever wanted to simply jump the counter and beat the said greedy bastard to death? Well, Arx will let you do that. Arx will let you kill, maim, ignore, befriend and spit on whoever you want whenever you want. But remember: all your actions, just like in the real world, will have equal and opposite reactions.

You'll rune the day

Of course, it goes without saying that this can all be done in fabulously good looking 3D,

courtesy of Arkane's proprietary engine and the team's desire to present the game in the firstperson. Considering the current popularity of the likes of Diablo 2 and Baldur's Gate 2, this is a rather interesting design choice. However, it is also a choice that betrays Arkane's plan to create a spiritual successor to the legendary Ultima Underworld.

Arx will also contain online deathmatches, heavy stealth elements and a completely unique, interactive spell casting system that involves players enacting complex rune rituals with a mouse. Which sounds nice.

In order to full immerse ourselves in a world of fantasy, we first have to be given the opportunity to act and do as we please, without the invisible constraints of an oh-so obvious play mechanic. Arkane is proposing to offer us that opportunity. Here's hoping that they can.

Daniel Staines
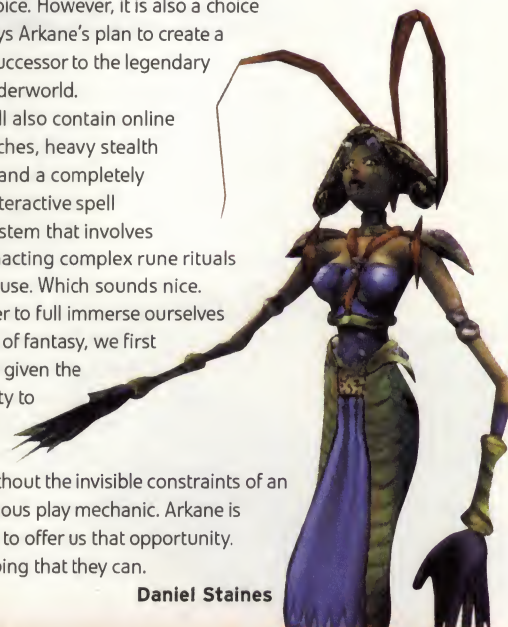
WHY ARX DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

| ■ It's a completely free-form, non-linear single player RPG | ■ The complex magic system looks very promising indeed | ■ The world reacts to what you do, when you do it and how | ■ Killing dwarves and greedy shopkeepers is always a plus |

Spotlight

EVERYTHING WORTH KNOWING ABOUT STUFF

GeForce 3

NVIDIA FINALLY INTRODUCES ITS LATEST GPU. WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Beauty or beast? Only time will tell

With 3dfx's demise earlier this year, the consumer graphics card market has been left to ATi and nVidia. nVidia's mercurial pace – the company aims to launch a new high performance product every six months – has allowed them to capture a commanding section of this market. And by a sheer will to power, nVidia has for the first time ever begun to outsell ATi. Budget offerings like the GeForce 2 MX have cemented their position, allowing the company to leapfrog ATi in the mainstream OEM market.

Despite this, it's been surprisingly long since nVidia launched a new GeForce product. The GeForce 2 GTS was released over 11 months ago, and since then, we've seen only speed-bumped improvements in the shape of the Pro and Ultra variants.

All your Base Belong to nVidia

The GeForce 3 is the first completely new GPU since the original GeForce 256. To give you an idea of the complexity, consider that the 57 million transistors in the GeForce 3 GPU is more than double the 25 million featured in the GeForce II GTS and 15 million more than the Pentium 4. Because of the increased transistor count, larger chips tend to be expensive to make, and generate more heat. To alleviate these issues, nVidia has moved to a smaller 0.15 micron fabrication process.

Architecturally, the GeForce 3 represents a completely new direction for nVidia. In past products, nVidia always stressed brute fillrate over other factors. This approach was necessary because nVidia was in close competition with the now-defunct 3dfx Inc. With the GeForce 3, nVidia are keen to point out that the raw power philosophy of past products is no longer feasible, particularly in light of memory constraints. Like the ATi Radeon before it, the GeForce 3 design abandons the raw fillrate approach, instead opting for a more elegant design. Although the clock speed and memory interface is identical to the GeForce 2 GTS, several new features dramatically improve the chip's efficiency, especially in regard to memory bandwidth. It's becoming increasingly apparent that even the fastest DDR DRAM modules are not fast enough to allow the latest generation of graphics products to show their full potential. ATi's lauded

Doom 3 and the Mac

BEST CRATES EVER?

The GeForce 3 was unveiled at Macworld, Tokyo, by the ever charismatic Steve Jobs. Not surprisingly, this caused quite a furor amongst the PC industry, principally because it was PC gamers that have put NVIDIA where they are today. Contrary to the grandiose claims of Mr Jobs, however, the GeForce3 will be out for the PC at the same time as the Mac.

During the keynote address, **John Carmack** of iD software used the in-development Doom III engine to demonstrate the power of the GeForce 3.

The game was run in real-time, using a PowerMac G4 733Mhz coupled with a pre-production GeForce 3. After the event, John Carmack posted on the Slashdot forums, "We do run a bit better on a high end Wintel
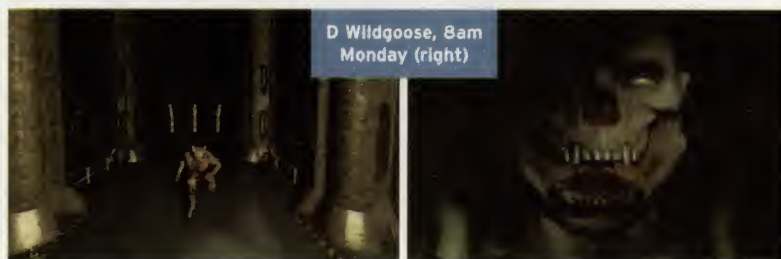
D Wildgoose, 8am Monday (right)

system, but the Apple performance is still quite good, especially considering the short amount of time that the drivers had before the event... It is still our intention to have a simultaneous release of the next product on Windows, MacOS-X, and Linux." He later added "Apple is doing a lot of good work, but the CPU's just aren't as fast as the x86 ones. AltiVec can compensate in some cases, because it is way, way easier to program for than SSE."

Carmack's evangelism of the newer Mac platforms could instigate a renewed interest in Mac gaming. For years Apple was neutral or even openly hostile towards games on its serious, business platform. Since Jobs' phoenix like return, the company has become more consumer-oriented. Certainly, convincing Carmack of the merits of the platform has been an important step. Better game-related hardware has been another important step forward for the Mac.

Blistering galactic death at over 7Gbps

HyperZ technology, which eliminated much of the extraneous Z-buffer information, was a direct response to memory bandwidth problems. nVidia has implemented a similar technology, dubbed the Lightspeed Memory Architecture, to remove much of the memory bottleneck.

Somebody set us up the nfiniteFX
The GeForce 3 also includes a new Quincunx FSAA method, which has a minimal impact upon performance. However, what makes the GeForce 3

especially interesting is the new programmable effects engine, which gives game developers a virtually unlimited palette of special effects. nVidia claims that the GeForce3 is the first chip available that allows software designers to reprogram the graphics pipeline in order to derive the most unusual visual effects.

Move GeForce3. For Great Justice!
With such impressive specifications, it's not surprising that the new chipset has garnered industry-wide approval. nVidia knows it has a winning product when the normally sanguine **John Carmack** waxed lyrical "… the GeForce 3 is fantastic. I haven't had such an impression of raising the performance bar since the Voodoo 2

came out, and there are a ton of new features for programmers to play with." And **Tim Sweeney**, of Epic and Unreal Tournament fame, raved "It's going to change everything. No more fixed-function pipeline… developers now have control over every pixel and every vertex. The GeForce 3 gives me a colossal stag."

The only problem with the GeForce 3, as far as we can see, is the cost. At over $1,200 for the initial wave of cards, only hardcore gamers need apply. A low-cost variant, similar to the GeForce 2 MX, should be announced in the near future. Also, the new card's introduction will likely mean price cuts for the GeForce2 GTS and Ultra cards. ATI is also likely to release the Radeon 2 in the near future.

Extra!

THE ADD-ON COLUMN

If you're reading this column while dressed in a Starfleet Academy uniform and scratching your recently shaved, Picard-esque head, then get excited. A press release recently issued by Activision has confirmed what you've been hoping for – an add-on pack for Raven's Star Trek: Elite Force. Considered by many fans to be the seminal Star Trek title, Elite Force was received with critical and commercial acclaim, thus prompting Raven to produce the pack that, unfortunately, we do not know the name of yet. However, what we *do* know is that it'll contain two new singleplayer scenarios and 17 multiplayer missions with a whole host of new gamestyles available.

However, before the joyous looting and rampant violence begins a la post-Lakers-victory Los

Angeles, I should point out that you have reason for pause. I think you should sit down for this… good. Okay, way back at E3 2000, amidst all the strobe lighting and Gary Colemans, Epic announced to the slavering gaming public that it would be developing an expansive add-on pack to the mega hit, Unreal Tournament. Well, sadly, this has been cancelled. If you can still read through the welling tears in your eyes then should know that the pack was canned simply because Infogrames thought that it wouldn't
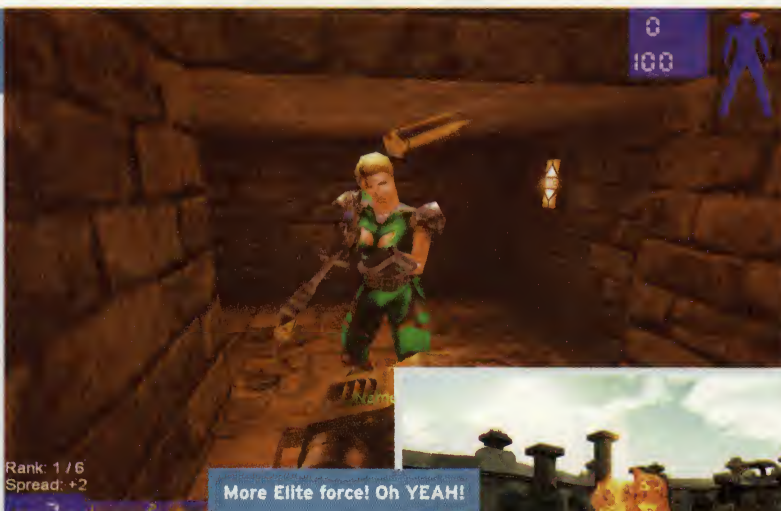
make enough cash. It's a shame, but an all too harsh reality in this cash bloated business of ours. Sigh.

And last but not least, we got the name of the Baldur's Gate II expansion wrong last month. It's not Throne of Baal, but Throne of Bhaal. And, boy, are we glad that that's been cleared up.

Rank: 1 / 6
Spread: +2

More Elite force! Oh YEAH!

Asheron again?

ONLINE RPG SEQUEL IN THE WORKS

The development of Asheron's Call II, sequel to the immensely popular MMORPG, is well under way at Turbine studios and has been officially announced by publisher Microsoft.

At the time of writing, neither a release date nor a definite title for the game have been confirmed, though it is known that the sequel will utilise Turbine's appropriately titled 'Turbine Engine 2.0' to much grand effect. More substantial information was set to be revealed at the upcoming Game Developers conference in March, where Turbine may run a tech demo to display the power of its new technology.

While being undoubtedly exciting, it's undeniable that the MMORPG market is certainly becoming a little crowded at the moment and the coming year should provide some hot competition for Turbine's ageing franchise. But if anyone has the expertise to make a great game, it's these guys and you can be your bottom dollar that if the call's loud, we will answer. Answer pronto.

Did somebody call?

Farms + Dudes = Gaming Bliss

Battlegrounds

LUCASARTS KNOCKS WESTWOOD DOWN

While Westwood announces its new game (see p18), here's something that just might be a bit of a worry for the realtime strategy king. LucasArts and Age of Empires creator Ensemble have revealed the development of Star Wars: Battleground, a "compelling Real Time Strategy franchise for the digital interactive gaming market".

What this means, when stripped of all the tofu smelling marketing jargon, is an RTS juggernaut with enough talent and brand power behind it to be truly dangerous indeed. Dangerous for whom? Well, dangerous for Westwood and its long reigning C&C franchise, of course. Battlegrounds is to be built upon a proprietary engine, incorporating Age of Empires II technology, while encompassing new technologies developed by Ensemble. This one is certain to be huge, so stay tuned for more details in an upcoming issue.

ISP Watch

BigPond ADSL

TELSTRA ATTEMPTS TO MEND FENCES WITH NEW BROADBAND PLAN

www.telstra.com.au/adsl

The big daddy of internet providers, Telstra was first off the block with consumer ADSL – which is not that surprising as they're the infrastructure provider too. But does their consumer service match up to the competition? Unfortunately there's no cut and dried answer. In terms of pricing, Telstra is very comparable – $78 for an ('acceptable use') unlimited download 256/64kb account per month, with Telstra selected as long distance carrier. All BigPond ADSL users have unlimited access to Telstra's Wireplay game servers as well, so there's plenty to keep you occupied. Telstra also offers ADSL in most major city/urban centres, and are gradually increasing coverage areas, so the chances are good that the service is available.

The downsides are that all the data Australia-wide is routed through Melbourne, increasing ping times from non-Victorian locations slightly. Telstra representatives have stated that they are working to localise routing on a state by state basis, but have set no timetable for implementation as yet. Also, many users are reporting significant ping and data transfer rate discrepancies between off-peak times and peak hours - a strong indicator of an oversubscribed service, particularly in highly populated areas such as Sydney, though Telstra are undoubtedly working to increase the bandwidth available towards parity levels.

Installation

Telstra BigPond ADSL offers the following types of contract:

Contract length	Installation fee
3 months	$399.00
12 months	$259.00
18 months	$189.00

Top

Monthly Plans

During the term of the contract, you can choose (and move between) any of the following monthly plans:

Plan	Monthly Fee without pre-selection^	Monthly Fee with pre-selection	MB allowance	Speed*	Additional users #	Rate per MByte after allowance
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Business Standard	$100.50	$84.00	500 MB	512/128		
Business Deluxe	$132.50	$116.00	500 MB	1500/256		
Freedom Standard	$94.50	$78.00	subject to AUP**	256/64	Up to 2 additional users	Not Applicable
Freedom Deluxe	$105.50	$89.00	subject to AUP**	512/128		

* Speeds are presented in downstream/upstream format eg: 256/64 represents up to 256kbps downstream/64 kbps upstream.

** Subject to Acceptable Use Policy

• Each additional user is charged at $11.00 per user per month.

^ Preselection refers to the Telstra pre-selected for long distance call on the telephone number used for ADSL.

Customers, who have modems from their previous Telstra BigPond ADSL trial service which has been disconnected, are eligible for a reduced installation fee of $189.00. The contract length for this service is three months and the $5.00 discount will apply after the end of this three month contract.

PCPP

SPEED	★★★
COST	★★★
UNLIMITED	TIME ✓ DATA ✓
LOCAL GAME SERVERS	✓

Server

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE INTERNET

ALL YOUR BASE...

Never underestimate the power of the internet, nor poorly translated Japanese console games - and definitely don't discount the power of mischievous geeks with time on their hands.

It all started innocently enough, with the 'Zany Video Game Quote' site (http://zanyvg.overclocked.org/) putting up an animated gif of the English version of the old Sega Genesis game, Zero Wing. The plot was fairly incomprehensible, but the intro to Zero Wing included such wacky sayings as "Somebody set up us the bomb!" and "All your base are belong to us" from a mysterious evil nemesis called Cats, and a ship captain who decides to "take off every zig."

The essence of the gag was to PhotoShop one of the Zero Wing phrases into other 'normal' pictures, and though it started off simply enough within a short period it spread through the internet amazingly quickly, spawning thousands and thousands of incredibly detailed pieces of artwork and suddenly AYBABTU was the coolest, hippest thing on the internet.

The material that has spawned through AYBABTU's short life span (it's already passe,

naturally) is staggering, including a wildly popular MP3 **www.mp3.com/tlmom**, and flash video **www.planetstarseige.com/allyourbase**. Check out The AYBABTU History page at **hubert.retrogames.com/history.htm** - just don't use the phrase to try and appear cool. It's not, anymore. (*Oh damn! - Ed*)

APSTERN

The recent court decision compelling Napster to get serious about allowing sharing of copyrighted material has resulted in the company really clamping down on the MP3's available through the application. It hasn't taken long, however, for a quick fix to be created and made available that attempts to allow 'business as usual' for music fans, from software developer Aimster. It might not be a technological breakthrough, but it may well be enough to keep the now dwindling Napster userbase happy for a while. Called the 'Aimster Pig Encoder' all it does is change the MP3 file names into pig latin, so "Jazz Devil.mp3" is renamed "Azzj Evild.mp3" for example. Http://www.aimster.com for more, though there are now plenty of other P2P file sharing applications other than Napster available, too.

Licence to...

FILM AND TV LICENCES SNAPPED UP

Three important licensing announcements were made this month, with news of the development of a Battle of the Planets game, a Matrix title, and a firstperson shooter based on the 2000AD Judge Dredd franchise.

Headfirst Productions has purchased the Battle of the Planets license. Saturdy Morning cartoon aficionados from the mid-eighties will recall the adventures of G-Force, a band of five orphans each with a special alter-ego and crazy vehicle. Headfirst Productions is working on an "adrenalin pumping, adrenaline-pumping (sic) action game featuring cartoon shaded realtime graphics, single and co-operative multiplayer gameplay, and even the Fiery Phoenix!" according to Headfirst Director **Mike Woodroffe**. Expect to fight the evil Zoltar in Q4 2002.

Meanwhile, Interplay has parted with an undisclosed but considerable sum of money in order to secure the license to Hollywood sci-fi epic The Matrix. Shiny will handle at least the first game. Writer-directors the Wachowski Brothers will be closely involved with the development of the Matrix title, which will be a thirdperson action game following the plot of the Matrix sequel and subsequent films. With Shiny's impressive track record, the Matrix game is likely to impress.
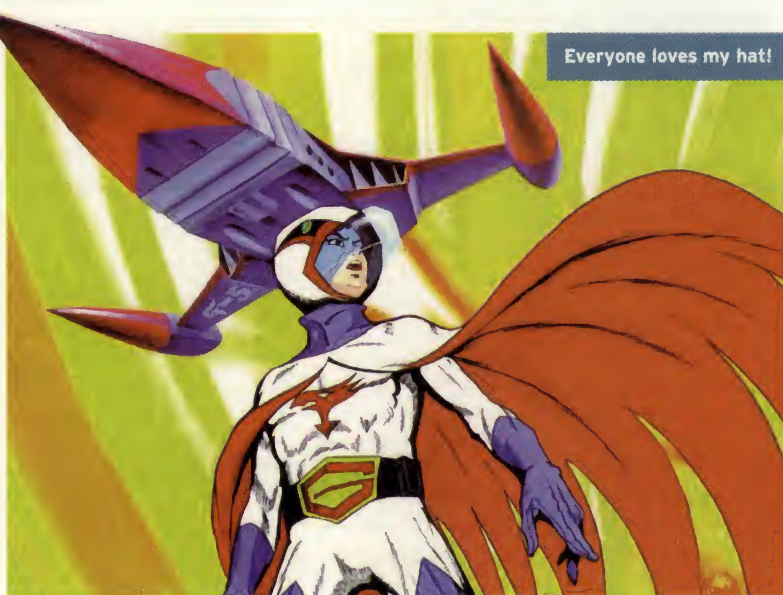
Everyone loves my hat!

Also, Rebellion has purchased the well-known Judge Dredd 2000AD comicbook license, in order to develop a firstperson shooter, heavily featuring Dredd's famous Lawgiver. Rebellion's Jason Kingsley says while the comic has lost much of its cult following in recent years, he recognises the game has a big job ahead of it to renew interest in the franchise, especially following the B-grade Sly Stallone Judge Dredd film. Possibilities for the game include an option to play using a preferred artistic rendering of the Judge, since the comic employs several different styles to depict the man who once cried "I am the law!"

The two biggest remaining computer game licensing opportunities are though to be Terminator 3 and Terminator 4.

Westwood Ho!

EARTH & BEYOND DETAILS RELEASED

After a good deal of essentially baseless speculation and rumour mongering, the gaming community has at last been treated to a taste of Westwood's secrecy shrouded Massively Multiplayer RPG/Space-sim opus, Earth & Beyond. As the title suggests, the game is heavily focused on space combat technologica and is set in a (surprise!) suitably Dystopian 23rd century.
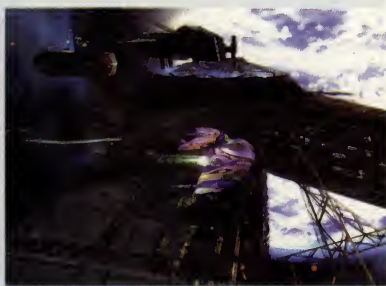
Why every game developer insists on littering the future with broken skyscrapers and ragged underclass mutants is certainly a mystery, but not one to be discussed here. At any rate, the game has (apparently) been in secret development for five years now and combines the panache of classic spacers like Elite and Homeworld with some good old RPG mechanics a la EverQuest. Earth & Beyond has far too many features to detail in a brief news piece, so expect a first look or full preview from us soon!

Confidential

SIGN THE NDA... IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

Lots of juicy news from gameland's loveliest couple this month, with crazy rumour and speculation flying hither and yon about John Romero and his blushing whatever Stevana 'Killcreek' Case. Ion Storm seemed for a while to have sacked Romero, and with good cause, but then it seemed Romero had only been shunted to a lower-profile position within the company. THEN it appeared the Man with the Amazing Hair was set to announce development on another game in no way related to a clumsy translation of Big Sword.

What we do know for sure is that Killcreek has left Ritual to go where all ex-Playboy centrefolds go. That's right, HOLLYWOOD! Expect to see Killcreek appear soon in such straight-to-video productions as Deathmatch and Deathmatch II: Biker Chicks in Zombie Town. Actually we made those up. Killcreek is going to star in a multi-million dollar adaptation of James Joyce's Ulysses. Actually we made that up too. We don't even know if she's going to Hollywood for sure. But she has quit Ritual. Definitely.

Finally, though there is some real news. Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge, a game that was set to see developers Mythos return to the golden age of X-COM style turn-based tactical squad action, has been canned. Like all good teams prepared to put in the hours to bring a dream to reality, Mythos has run out of cash. So no more Dreamland, unless a generous benefactor wants to sink another six million into this money pit.

LUCASARTS ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY PRESENTS

STAR WARS™
BATTLE for NABOO

PC CD

FAST, FURIOUS ACTION IN THE TRADITION OF
STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON®

Mod Life

SPOONMAN'S ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS

EXISTENCE
For Half-Life
Developer Existence
URL www.whatisexistence.com
Release TBA

Everyone's favourite Keanu Reeves is back, wearing even blacker clothes and cooler sunglasses. Well, sort of. This mod looks great with an excellent, if (obviously) used storyline with lots of crunchy new weapons and characters.

SNARK WARS
For Half-Life
Developer A bunch of Snarks
URL www.planethalflife.com/snarkwars
Release Beta 2

Everybody loves those cute furry snarks. So now, Snark Wars once again gives you the opportunity to launch them, destroy them throw them, and even be them in this new make of an old mod. This mod hasn't worked since version 1.1 of Half-Life, but is now updated and ready to rock again. The big thing with this is weapon replacement, and it's not all that realistic, but hey it's fun and not to be taken too seriously.

SCIENTIST HUNT
For Half-Life
Developer Rich's Project Warehouse
URL www.telefragged.com/thefatal/
Release v 1.1

Scientist Hunt is quite old, but it's just had a new release which makes it worth covering. Scientist Hunt is fantastic for releasing those nine to five blues with an excellent array of weapons specifically designed to mash scientists good and proper. The basic premise is quite obvious, kill as many scientists as you can in as short a possible time. You can have enemy players as well, but you know, that's not as much fun.

THE CIRCLE OF STONE AND SHADOW
For Thief 2
Developer Through the Looking Glass
URL www.ttlg.com/cosas/main.asp
Release TBA

It's not often we get word of anything about a mod for a game like Thief. What's even more surprising however is that this could be one of the mods of the year, if not ever. The Circle of Stone and Shadow (TCSS) is far, far more than a few add-on maps, it takes you deep into an enthralling new storyline where you become Keith, the young burglar, who has sought out Master Nightfall in his quest for survival. Now if that doesn't sound cool I don't know what does. As far as general features go TCSS is chock full of new missions, new enemies and loads of other new characters. To help you get used to all the new features there's even a tutorial level which fills you in on the plot while letting you get the hang of your new surroundings.

TCSS looks absolutely stunning and is sure to be extremely popular. The loving attention to detail and completeness will surely not be overlooked by even the most casual Thief fan.

FRAG-ALL ROCK II
Location Toronto (Newcastle) NSW
Dates 17/4/01 - 20/4/01
Players 60
Price $35
URL fragall.qgl.org
The second incarnation of FRAG-all Rock is coming and you'd be mad to pass up this glorious gaming marathon. With even more sponsors than before (including Gamersport and a new deal with the Computer Handymen Gosford) there will be even more excellent prizes and all out mayhem. All food and accommodation is included in the $35 and the whole network is 100Mbit switched. You'd better hurry because places fill up faster than David Wildgoose chasing the (*Snip! - Ed*).

THE TRIBES 2 LAN
Location Boronia (Melbourne) VIC
Dates 7/4/01 8am - 4am
Players 50
Price TBA (approx $15)
URL www.lanoutloud.f2s.com/
This LAN is completely geared for people who are sick and tired of Counter-Strike and Quake 3 Arena. Tribes and Tribes 2 are definitely the main games here so you might as well pack your BFG away and load up your Disc Launcher for the oncoming onslaught. As well as Tribes this LAN caters for racing sims, another great multiplayer genre lots of people overlook. Your $15 or so includes food as well, so it really is quite good value.

THE LAN WITH NO NAME
Location Leongatha VIC
Dates 8/4/01 - 9/4/01
Players TBA
Price $5
URL None, contact Chris Marshall on bunnaman@yahoo.com
Leongatha is probably known to most as a burgeoning metropolis, and it now has its own LAN Party. What strikes me mostly is the face that it's only $5 for an overnighter and they still give you free food and have net connection. Face it, if you're in or near Leongatha you should really do yourself a favour and go and check it out. Two days of lanning for less than a Big Mac meal? I'm in.

The Professionals

## A SPECIAL REPORT ON AUSTRALIAN PRO-GAMING FROM ONLINE GAMING GURU LOKI

The biggest news in Australian Quake III History broke late last year with the announcement that Andrew "Python" Cha Cha was to be professionally sponsored to compete in Quake III Tournaments around the world. This was revolutionary in Australian eyes but around the world there are more and more people who make some cash, if not a living, out of PC gaming.

Shortly after the Python announcement www.ozquake.com and the Cyber Shack Radio show, a traditionally transmitted radio show dealing with all things "online", started the ball rolling in another evolutionary leap for online Australian gaming; a national online Quake III Tournament with serious prizes. AMD got behind the concept and by January of this year www.ozquake.com was testing the waters with the richest online gaming event to be held in this country. A diverse field of players competed for close to $3,000 in prizes, the crown being taken by a young Melbourne lad known as Blight0r.tr. For his efforts he took home a Creative Nomad Jukebox, a limited edition Quake III Arena Hockey Jersey and a copy of Windows ME. The comp attracted several of the recognised Top 10 and was truly a Clash of the Titans that could not easily be emulated at a LAN.

There is no denying that the online Quake III scene in Australia is strong, and growing stronger. Challenge-au are currently running a two player team ladder with 64 teams competing. Ozquake has received over 180 registrations from gamers interested in future online comps, and through alliances with Challenge-au, Games@EISA and Ausgamers, Ozquake hopes to keep Quake at the head of the pack when it comes to seeking sponsorship.

(PCPP readers can follow Loki's exploits at www.ozquake.com)
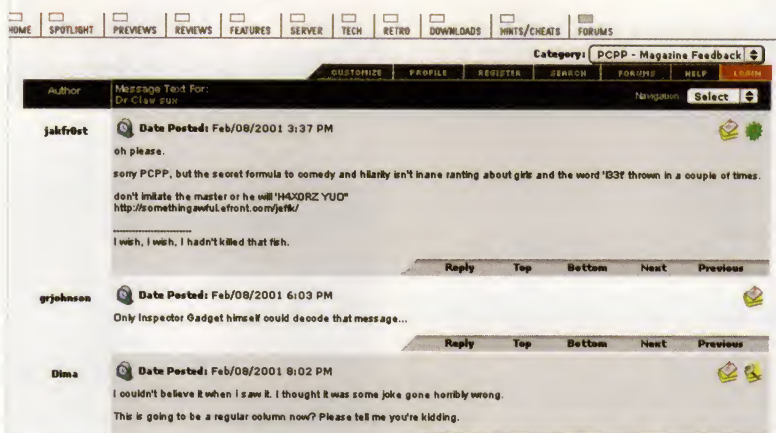
dr claw
THINK OF IT AS OUR REVENGE...

hi this is my new job because i am so popular from the forums i am now in the front part of the mag. but david said i have to use fullstop and comma sometimes. but i am not using capitals because they are not l33+.

it is now my task to tell you that things are really happening on the pcpp website which is at www.pcpowerplay.com.au and it is really l33+ like me. my cat and i are online every night after school and we like the site because there are downloads of the latest demos and stuff and also the forums are really cool because i am popular there.

this month in the forums there was some bad stuff when they hacked Anthony's username and posted stuff about him being a Young Liberal and also that he didn't like pcpp which is a lie he likes it a lot. then the moderator came on because everyone wanted them too, but no one would believe they were the moderator even though they were called moderator.

if you want more action though you can come on IRC on austnet and join #PCPP and now Skerath has to like me because i mentioned his little chat site so i am l33+ (but Skerath is not). see you online! my cat will be there too and maybe even Lucy Liu if we're lucky.

DVDA
WITH JAMES COTTEE

DUNE
David Lynch was the only man who could have brought Frank Herbert's epic vision to the screen. Who else would dare cast Sting in black plastic underpants? Patrick Stewart steals every scene he's in, as does the floating fat man, but in a production of this quality everyone's a winner. Also featuring DTS sound encoding, a first for a locally authored DVD. What are you waiting for? Take a tab of Spice Melange and enjoy 80 million dollars worth of arid insanity.
●●●◖

THE DEAD ZONE
Christopher Walken playing a moody character in a supernatural thriller? Now there's a turn up for the books. This David Cronenberg realisation of a Stephen King book sees a young man emerge from a traffic accident with a second sight: simply by touching a person's hand, he can see when they will die! Of course an irreversible wasting disease accompanies the condition, but whatcha gonna do? No fantastic exploding heads in this one, but plenty of headspace gets explored.
●●◖

THUNDERBIRDS VOLUME 2
They don't make TV like this anymore. Giant industrial machinery and disturbing puppets collide in the must-have DVD series of the year. The year is 2065, and a secret organisation is protecting the world from nasty disasters. Whether they are exterminating lost civilisations, or saving the Bank of England from shady spivs, International Rescue are always F.A.B! You get four whole episodes per disc, so why not collect the whole set! All eight of them! An absolute bargain at twice the price!
●●●

JOHN CARPENTER'S HALLOWEEN
They made a lot of films in this series, including a particularly execrable one at the pictures recently, but this 1978 original is where it all started, and where it's at. John Carpenter and his synthesiser are at the peak of their powers, supplying unrelenting tension and repetitive electronic beats. There's an inhuman killer stalking a clutch of high schoolers, on Halloween no less. Only one girl is even suspicious, but will anyone listen before it's too late? Of course not! Top film!
●●●

GET CARTER
There's a vile remake of this playing at the movie houses at the moment, but discerning viewers should skip straight to the 1971 original. Michael Caine plays Jack Carter, London hitman who takes off for his home town of Newcastle when his brother dies in mysterious circumstances. And when he finds out he was murdered, every mobster in town is going to pay... Great performances, pacey directing, and easily one of the best British films ever made.
●●●●

Dungeon Siege

Dungeon Siege

Dungeon Siege

Dungeon Siege

Coming soon

Need for Speed: Motor City

Need for Speed: Motor City

Need for Speed: Motor City

Need for Speed: Motor City
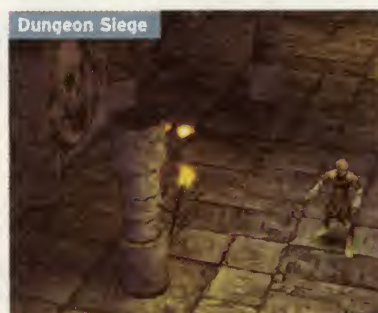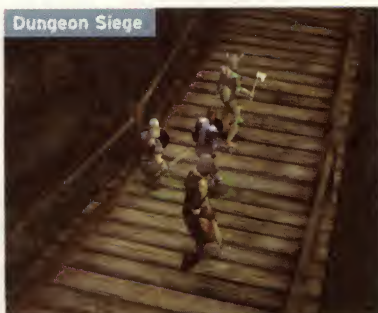
APRIL 2001
Dragon Riders (Ubisoft)
Evil Dead (THQ)
Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
Fallout Tactics (Interplay)
Hostile Waters (Interplay)
Legends of Might & Magic (Jack of all Games)
Serious Sam (Jack of all Games)
Summoner (THQ)
Tribes 2 (Jack of all Games)

MAY 2001
Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
Desperados (Ozisoft)
Destroyer Command (Ozisoft)
Leadfoot (Jack of all Games)
MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
Myst 3: Exile (Ozisoft)
Operation Flashpoint (Ozisoft)
Silent Hunter II (Ozisoft)
Startopia (Ozisoft)
Tropico (Jack of all Games)

JUNE 2001
Alone in the Dark (Ozisoft)
Arcanum (Jack of all Games)
Baldur's Gate 2: Throne of Bhaal (Interplay)
Conflict Zone (Ubisoft)
Diablo II: Lord of Destruction (Jack of all Games)
Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
Emperor: Battle for Dune (Electronic Arts)
Fly II (Jack of all Games)
Gangsters 2 (Ozisoft)
Harpoon 4 (Ozisoft)
I-War 2: Edge of Chaos (Ozisoft)
Pool of Radiance (Ozisoft)
Red Faction (THQ)

JULY 2001
Mafia (Jack of all Games)
Max Payne (Jack of all Games)
Need for Speed: Motor City (Electronic Arts)
Neverwinter Nights (Interplay)

Australia's most wanted

Well, Black & White has been released at long last, so it's time to bid farewell to Lionhead's roleplaying god sim. It's had a good run, topping the chart for as long as anyone can remember. Your top ten looks a little different without it - well, the screenshot we chose to accompany the list looks different at least. So what has assumed the mantle and wormed its way into your heart, stealing the affections of a nation and other mixed metaphors? It's clear you all love your firstperson shooters, isn't it. Red Faction just pipped out a brave challenge from Tribes 2 (the latter is clear evidence of the success of the full version of Tribes on our March coverdisc), with Wolfenstein again only a mere handful of votes behind. Further down there's a new entry for

Doom 3

Doom 3 (or New Doom, whatever you wish to call it), while Halo returns for a small encore.
This month's random voter, **S. Hurst** of **Potts Point NSW**, has scored a copy of Emperor: Battle for Dune. Send your Top Five most wanted games to:
wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au.

1	RED FACTION	◄
2	Tribes 2	◄
3	Return to Castle Wolfenstein	◄
4	Neverwinter Nights	◄
5	Emperor: Battle for Dune	◄
6	Doom 3	◄
7	Commandos 2	◄
8	Warcraft 3	◄
9	Pool of Radiance	◄
10	Halo	◄

Hall of fame

PCPP'S MOST RECENT GOLD AWARDED GAMES - BUY THEM ALL!
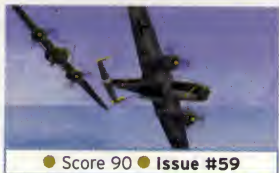
Battle of Britain
Electronic Arts
This WWII flight sim is a gripping, absorbing game that combines strategy and action brilliantly.

● Score 90 ● **Issue #59**
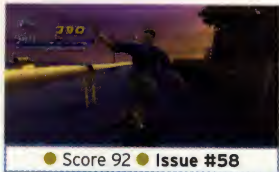
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2
Activision
Much more than a console conversion or mere skateboarding sim, Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2's fluid gameplay mechanics are a breath of air on the PC.

● Score 92 ● **Issue #58**
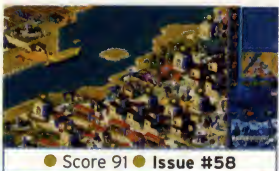
Zeus
Havas Interactive
Intuitive, accessible, yet beguilingly complex, Zeus takes the little blokes city building game one step closer to god.

● Score 91 ● **Issue #58**

Mechwarrior 4
Microsoft
After the disappointing third in the series, FASA Interactive has resurrected the mech sim with this fourth effort. Hardly original, but polished to perfection.

● Score 91 ● **Issue #57**

B-17 2
Hasbro
Despite the 11th hour loss of multiplayer, The Mighty Eighth offers such a compelling and varied singleplayer game that the option isn't even missed. Well, almost…

● Score 90 ● **Issue #57**

Our most wanted

Hostile Waters

Halo

DAVID Do you remember Carrier Command?

HUGH It looks bloody amazing

Dungeon Siege

Pool of Radiance
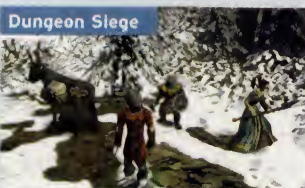
DANIEL To pass the time until Diablo 3

ANTHONY Could this be the first 2D RPG I actually like?

Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

inform
The Official Australian PC Games Chart
Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA   W/E February 18, 2001

Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games
(>$29.95 inc. GST)

Position		Game Title	Game Type
1	⇔	The Sims	Strategy
2	⇔	The Sims Livin' Large	Add On
3	⇔	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
4	⇧	Cmmd & Cnqr Red Alert 2	Strategy
5	⇧	Age of Empires Collector's Ed	Strategy
6	⇧	Sim Mania For Kids	Strategy
7	⇧	Age of Emp. 2: Conqueror's Exp	Add On
8	⇧	Diablo 2	RPG
9	⇩	Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
10	⇔	Age of Empires 2	Strategy
11	⇧	Links LS 2001	Sports
12	⇧	Delta Force 2	Adventure
13	⇩	Ashgan	Adventure
14	⊗	Elite Sports Pack	Sports
15	⇩	Combat Flight Sim 2.0	Simulator
16	⇧	Shogun: Total War	Strategy
17	⊗	Sabrina Teen Witch Spellbound	Family
18	⊗	Cmmd & Cnqr Tiberian Sun	Strategy
19	⇩	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Sports
20	⊗	Golf 2001	Sports

A V S D A
Australian Visual Software Distributors Association Ltd

⊗ - New entry
⇔ - Non mover
⇧ - Up from last month
⇩ - Down from last month

INBOX

Letters Topic: So does Black & White live up to the hype?
Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 **Email:** letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

I WAS STUCK
My friend and I recently decided to relive the Half-Life experience and start a new game. As I arrived at the platform the security guard walked up to the door to let me out, but instead he died and I was stuck. When I tried again I noticed other people that you see on the way in die too. Has this happened to anyone else?

Nicholas Egerton

I guess we will know once everyone starts playing it on an upcoming PCPP cover disc. Now is that too subtle a hint?

OF MOTION SICKNESS
I am one of the minority of people who have never played a Quake, Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, etc. My friends constantly tell me that they would neck themselves if they were unable to play their firstperson shoot-em-ups. Being a sufferer of motion sickness, I feel a headache whenever I see a firstperson shoot-em-up. Has there been any research or do any of your readers have any

suggestions on how to combat it? Any ideas at all would be appreciated, as I am restricted to strategy games, RPGs and Wing Commander.

Lewis Mercer

When you consider what's happening in a firstperson game – a 3D image represented on a 2D plane – it's surprising there aren't more people similarly affected. Being forced to play Wing Commander is a dire predicament, indeed.

INVENTIVE BRILLIANCE
So, id has released Team Arena and – hey! - it's like all the mods I've played except, you know, *worse*. Oh, and their next project? DOOM 3! Wow! It's good to see that they're moving on and getting really *innovative* with their ideas! I've also heard that they plan to remake Commander Keen! Whizzo! The inventive brilliance continues unabated! Hold those mental floodgates there, id people! We simply can not handle this torrential deluge of inventive originality!

Mr. Pissed

Although I have some sympathy for your sentiments, you should also find a more inventive punctuation to end your sentences. Exclamation marks tend to lose their impact when overused.

YOU FEEL DISTANT
I don't understand how games such as Firearms and Counter-Strike can claim to be teamplay games. Just because a game consists of one team vs another does not mean that you feel like a team player when playing the game. These games are more deathmatch within a team environment.

These games do have the use of voice command, but rarely is it used effectively. Far too often you feel distant from your 'teammates' and

BYTE SIZE
Where did the chets go in the mag?

Daniel Duncan

Unfortunately, Chet was sacked for not being able to spell.

notice that they feel the same way. Unless you are playing with a clan or group of friends then these games are simply pointless.

I was playing Counter-Strike over the Internet and this player kept gloating how good he was and how he was winning because he had so many kills. Yet his 'team' was getting beaten and this fool was simply sniping the enemy from afar. Geez, I hate that!

Leon Azzopardi

DOES IT HAVE ALIENS?
I finally got to play System Shock 2 (*Good start - Ed*). I was hoping for something big, but I found it was a pretty shocking game (*Oh no! - Ed*).

I like the idea of System Shock 2, with the interface and action stuff, but they really failed to make it exciting. There wasn't much action and you just basically walked around half the time being bored out of your brain (*"Fearing for your life", surely? - Ed*).

I was wondering if Deus Ex is anything like System Shock 2. It's alright if it has the interface, but is it exciting with lots of action and variety? And does it have aliens? I hope not cause if Deus Ex is anything like System Shock 2 it is pretty poor to mark it as best game of all time...

Pieter Visser

MAG EACH MONTH
I am writing to say that your magazine is the best one out there on the market. It is also the best value for money. Being a poor student here in New Zealand, getting your mag each month is great. To the person who wrote in PCPP#57 about the captions being a waste of time: they are the best part of the mag.

C. Nicol

Finally, a compliment! Thanks.

ANY PREVIOUS POINT
In PCPP#57, there was a big deal made about the 'design decision' to disable savegames during a mission in Project IGI. The argument was that

this makes it a more challenging game, which it does.

I would just like to point out that a much better way of implementing this 'feature' is to only save when the user quits, like in Diablo and a few other titles. This way you can't go back to any previous point, but you can still exit the game if your boss happens to come along (insert your own scenario here).

In the good old days programmers found it too hard to save a game during levels, but there is certainly no excuse for it in this day and age. You call it game design, I call it laziness.

ABCGi

I don't see how your idea would make any difference to those who found IGI frustrating. Surely they would also complain about being 'forced' to constantly quit the game and reload!

To any developer out there considering the option of no in-mission saves, please make sure the missions either remain short and non-linear or auto-save after the completion of each objective.

INCORRECT SETTINGS

Firstly, I must confess to being a major id fan and supporter. I love their work and have followed them from day one. It was for this reason that I eagerly awaited the Australian release of Quake 3 Team Arena. I was fed up with my mates and their 'but UT is better' B.S.

I installed Quake 3 Team Arena and it hit me... I just couldn't believe my frames per second rate. There must be something wrong, an incorrect system setting, maybe a problem with the installation itself. Nope, none of the above, this was id's idea of game improvements. Even on fastest system setting and all the bells and whistles turned off, I felt like I was playing online with some kid from Greenland! Although my machine isn't the latest and greatest, it runs Quake 3 Arena more than comfortably and it well and truly surpasses the minimum system requirements on the Quake 3 Team Arena game documentation.

MANIC35

BYTE SIZE

You guys are yet to review the excellent game Sudden Strike.

Matt

Turn to p68.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SHARED MEMORY INSTEAD

In regards to the new Microsoft XBOX, I have discovered that even though it has at total of 64MB RAM, that this is actually shared RAM.

In other words, you have the CPU, graphics, and sound processor chips all requiring RAM to run them. Since there is only a total of 64MB, this has to be divided constantly between the three areas that run the XBOX. And yet still have no obvious framerate or performance drop. What a job.

I think it is great that Microsoft try out the console market and get a response, but be prepared to get some knock backs due to shared memory instead of 64MB for each area. I believe that this shared memory is done for cost reasons only. This sounds too familiar to the bottleneck that has plagued the PS2 with its miniscule 4MB of VRAM, which would not even run a game on a PC.

Rodney Mayhew

To address your concerns, we called upon two leading experts in the field. First, Tim Sweeney of Epic Games, and lead programmer for Unreal Warfare:

"The Unreal engine is pretty sensitive to both memory latency and memory bandwidth. The P4's Rambus focus is okay for this, but it's not optimal. I expect DDR will perform better for most of the high-performance 3D games on the market. The XBOX architecture (unified memory architecture, DDR memory) is really the model of what's ideal for us."

Second, Hugh Norton-Smith, PCPP's Tech Editor:

"Unified memory is the most flexible memory standard - memory can be divvied up depending on the style of the game. Developers love it. For example, a graphics dependent game could put almost all of the memory towards hi-res textures, whereas other games could use a large chunk of memory for AI routines or rich sound fonts. 64MB of memory, combined with powerful texture compression, is a much more efficient memory system than Sony's rather odd PS2 system. As you sagely mentioned, the meagre 4MB of available texture RAM on the PS2 is a serious bottleneck."

Hope that clears up the matter.

The texture quality of Team Arena is higher than normal Quake 3. This would explain why performance on your system isn't comparable. Rest assured, there are other reasons to feel cheated by Team Arena.

BROUGHT US GOOD

I was reading this article on this web page the other day and it said that nVidia had bought out 3dfx. This is the worst news I have heard in a long, long time. 3dfx has always brought us good quality chipsets and always did what was in the best interest of the consumer. nVidia on the other hand are just money hungry sons of bitches. I have always bought 3dfx cards and never even thought about the nVidia chipsets. I have sworn never to buy an nVidia chipset, so hopefully ATI and S3 stay in business.

James Clift

Time to wake up to reality, James. Without question, nVidia has

produced the best videocards for some years now. To dismiss this based on the childish notion that 3dfx = Good and nVidia = Bad is quite frankly stupid.

CURRENTLY FORMULATING

My question is this: How would some, with no programming knowledge, but a good imagination get into the gaming industry? I ask this because I have a top idea for a game which I am currently formulating, but where would I go and who would I have to see to make a reality?

Alan Healey

Although there are many people working on games who have little programming knowledge, they are definitely in a minority. Obviously there are areas like art, sound and QA, but perhaps your best bet would be to start working with the editor for your favourite game. The games industry always needs designers.

NO ONE CARES

I think you should rename the Editorial to "The spot where Ed drivels on about crap that no one cares about", and the bit under that with the PCPP crew to "The spot where the PCPP crew attempt to be witty and humorous, occasionally succeeding, but generally failing dismally."

Izorpo

And what should Inbox be retitled, I wonder...

BYTE SIZE

Don't know about you, but I reckon that Red Alert 2 is the game Tiberian Sun should have been.

Terry Moore

I think we have all heard that one before.

CONSTANT ROTATION

I'm just writing to talk about a sadly neglected area of the games industry: music. That's right: music. I like game music. The title theme from Deus Ex gets constant rotation on my MP3 playlist at home and I won't even mention the troubles I've had trying to extract the song files from Q3A.

Speaking of Quake 3 Team Arena, who could forget the mighty original Quake headed up by industrial legend Mr. Trent Reznor? The seething, melancholic cacophony that was the Quake soundtrack was a true masterpiece of atmospheric melody and should have been sold as a stand alone CD release.

The point of all this? Well, what I'm trying to say is that maybe we should pay more attention to whose doing the tunes in the games we love. Okay, graphics are great and those who create them should be praised but, come on, what's life without music?

L. Howlett

Now there's a really great idea for a feature...

Alcatraz

I AM A ROCK, I AM AN ISLAND...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Philos Laboratories

PUBLISHER
CDV

AVAILABLE
4th Qtr 2001

URL
www.philoslabs.com

Blending the top-down tactical action of Commandos with the old school jailbreak thrills of The Great Escape, Philos Laboratories' upcoming Alcatraz promises to be nothing if not interesting. The game is set in an alternative future in which the mighty Alcatraz still stands supreme among criminal punishment facilities. After springing various specialists from other prisons and building a dedicated squad, the player's job is to break the unimaginatively titled 'Big Boss' from the Big House, Alcatraz. Replete with a razor sharp comic edge and tasty visuals, we can't wait until Philos springs this one out.

Criminal geniuses - all of them

Not a good hiding spot

Divinity

GET CLOSER TO GOD IN THIS NEW RPG

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Larian Studios

PUBLISHER
CDV

AVAILABLE
3rd Quater 2001

URL
www.larian.com

After an employee of Larian Studios, developer of the RPG romp Divinity, commented that his game would 'beat' the likes of Baldur's Gate II in many ways, we immediately took notice. But how does one go about besting the likes of Bioware? By incorporating a strong, character-driven narrative with mindless, Diablo-esque hack 'n slash fun, apparently. Divinity boasts to be the fine line upon which two obviously distinct play styles meet and, hopefully, coerce comfortable, thus forming a true gaming opus. Whether or not it lives up to this remains to be seen, but with a nifty engine and modest system requirements, we certainly hope and assume that Divinity will be all that it's touted to be.

This guy's seen the light
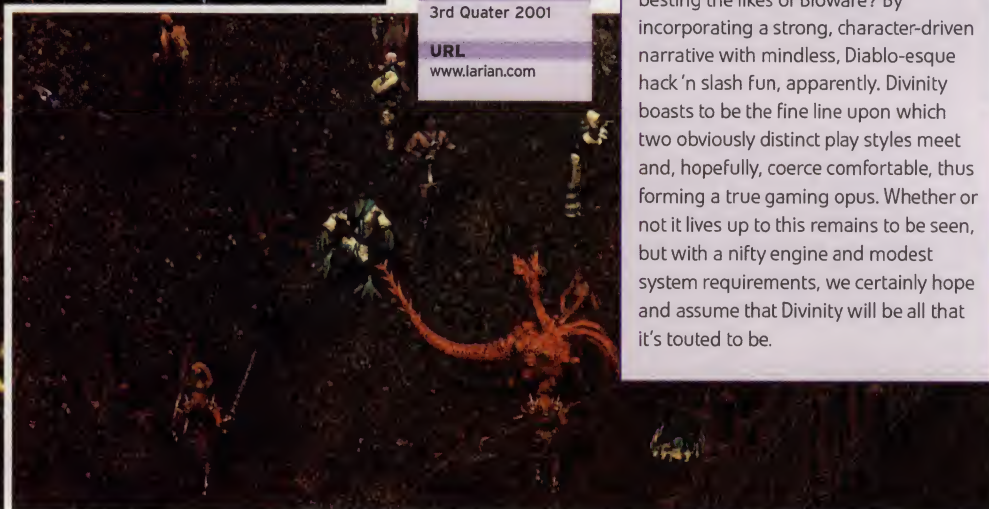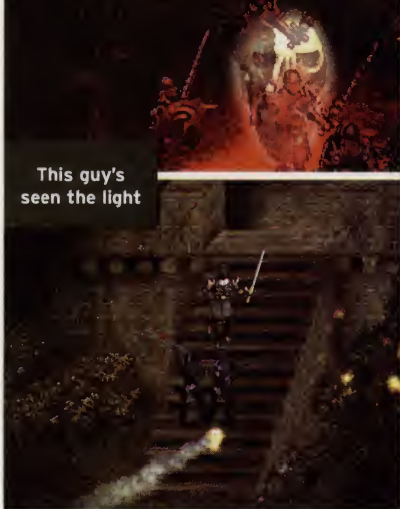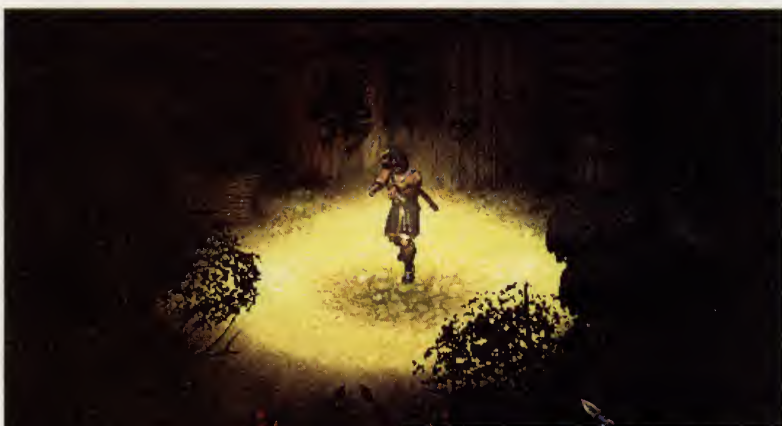
No sign of Sting just yet...

Emperor Battle for Dune

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER SCREENSHOT

Still no sign of Sting...

Happily going back to its roots, Westwood is continuing to make consistent ground with the forthcoming RTS oeuvre, Emperor: Battle for Dune. In a refreshing retreat from the quickly stagnating traditional top-down strategy formula, Emperor: Battle for Dune offers players strategic decisions that are not merely limited to merely deciding whether to attack or defend. Instead, you will be able to plot tactical courses that affect not only the outcome of the battle you are involved in, but also, the entire war as a whole. At any rate, we gave all this ample coverage in our previous preview, so for now just sit back and drool over all of the new screenshots.

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Westwood

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE
June

URL
www.westwood.com

IL 2-Stumrovik

FLIGHT SIM OF THE YEAR - ALREADY

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Maddox Games

PUBLISHER
Blue Byte

AVAILABLE
3rd Qtr 2001

URL
www.bluebyte.net

Beta testing as we speak, the Blue Byte published WWII combat flight sim, IL 2-Sturmovik, is looking better and better as it comes closer to completion. Offering over 20 types of Russian, German and American planes, Sturmovik recreates the tense, oft overlooked air battles that were waged over Eastern European soil following the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941. Players will be able to immerse themselves into massive squadron based dogfights where up to 35 other fighters will be shooting each other up in ever attractive, smooth 3D. With its sights firmly set on 'brilliant', it looks as if Sturmovik won't be misfiring. Bombs away!

Russia isn't the most scenic country
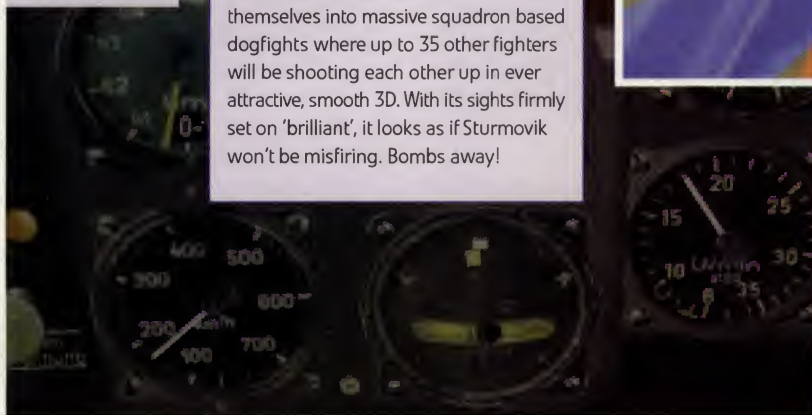
Leadfoot

ANTHONY FORDHAM STRAPS IN AND TAKES
OFF AT HIGH SPEED... UNDER LIGHTS!

My other car
is also very
stupid-looking

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Ratbag

PUBLISHER
Wizard Works

AVAILABLE
Q2 2001

URL
www.ratbag.com

Saturday
morning on
Parramatta Road
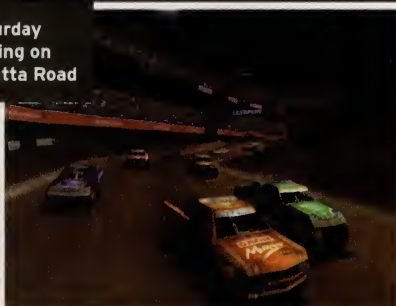
S o far, Ratbag has simulated Dirt Track Rrracing and Dirt Track Rrracing: Sprint Cars, two hugely popular redneck motor sports from the US. Not content with dominating the don't-make-me-turn-right-or-my-head-might-explode school of rrracing, Ratbag has now moved to simulate the hugely popular world of Stadium 4x4 Rrracing.

That's right, off-road indoor competition, for when fat rednecks want to suck down monster-sized hotdogs and watch the mud fly at the same time, all in a healthy family environment.

While these screenshots show only a series of trucks going around corners, the nature of Stadium 4x4 Rrracing includes some devilish switchbacks, killer chicanes and of course, jumps. Never before in any indoor rrracing simulation has there been such an opportunity to smash seven kinds of Garth Brooks out of a tonne and a half of howling metal.

This is the fourth iteration of Ratbag's stellar Difference Engine. Apart from having the most literary name ever, the Difference Engine is also the fastest 3D rrracing engine in the world. It has received even further tweaks in Leadfoot, with Ratbag paying special attention to low-end systems. The developer claims extra support has been added for Pentium II 266 machines without a 3D accelerator.

Ratbag makes special mention of jump physics. Every second Saturday in the US, the stadiums of Stadium 4x4 Rrracing are packed to the bleachers with jump-heads. People come to Stadium 4x4 Rrracing for the jumps. Drivers drive for the jumps. It's all about the jumps. To this end, Ratbag has vastly improved the Difference Engine's handling of unpowered flight. To wit, the effect of gravity. In Powerslide, for instance, cars had a tendency to spin lazily in the air like a catapulted wool bail. Leadfoot, however, will give vehicles a correct centre of gravity, so rolls, dives and the ever-popular four-wheel slam-into-the-pepsi-ad-on-the-barrier will all look and feel great.

The game will include two types of rrracing machine; superlites and pickups. The superlite is a buggy, much like the sprint cars in Sprint Cars, except without the big fins on the top to make them tip over. A pickup is yank-speak for ute, a small truck with a tray on the back, in this case filled by an enormous motor. The two classes of rrracer will have "more than three models!" according to Ratbag, which is quite exciting.

Leadfoot includes devilish switchbacks, killer chicanes and of course, jumps

Ratbag's games have thus far been deceptive. DTR: Sprint Cars looked like it should have been a moronic, drive-in-circles opportunity to explore new facets of boredom, but in fact proved to be an intelligent, engaging rrracing sim. With a more dynamic rrrace model, jumps and the heady glare of stadium lighting, Leadfoot: Stadium 4x4 Rrracing is sure to impress petrol-heads and sensitive new-age Sunday drivers alike.

Conflict Zone

THE BBC'S **HUGH NORTON-SMITH**
REPORTING LIVE FROM THE BATTLEZONE...

French artificial intelligence developer Mathematiques Appliquees S.A. (MASA), is aiming to revitalise the realtime strategy game. Conflict Zone is the first RTS that attempts to reflect the reality of modern warfare, where campaigns involve not only military units, but civilians and media.

Conflict Zone eschews the usual resource management found in RTS games - harvesting minerals, building bases, mining for ore or hunting for deer - and instead forces players to leverage media coverage and political ambition to win the war. The ultimate objective is to thoroughly obliterate the enemy, both politically and militarily.

> the enemy AI will feature cognitive anticipation, evolving behaviour and the ability to match the player's skill

A New Spin on RTS
The power of the media was demonstrated to great effect in the Gulf War. Ted Turner's CNN, in cahoots with the ever-savvy Norman Schwarzkopf, transformed Desert Storm into a sensational Pay-Per-View event. Not only did they manage to convince the public that it was a virtually casualty-free war, but they also duped people into believing that the Patriot missile system had a 100% kill-rate against Scuds.

Likewise, in the cynical, modern world of Conflict Zone, it's not enough for you to win the war, you must also woo the favour of a reluctant media. Without media approval, public resentment towards the war effort will mount. Ergo, massacring civilians a la Command & Conquer (accidentally, or not) will swing public opinion against you. With television cameras trained on your every move, any perceived transgression (atrocities etc) will outrage the public. This will, in turn, lead to a reduction in military funding and, eventually, to the loss of command. Reporters roam the battlefield, and a constant video-feed from the TV network will help you determine public opinion towards your actions.

Increase the Peace!
Set in the not too distant future, players can assume the role of a General in the ICP (Insane Clown Posse? International Cabbalistic Pr0n?) or, alternatively, as a rogue dictator. The ICP is a sort of 21st Century United Nations, committed to peacekeeping. On the other hand, if you choose to be a dictator, expect to find yourself defending your borders and annihilating the ICP.

Besides the obligatory tutorial mode, there are two available campaigns, each offering sixteen playable missions. The scenarios include wars in different parts of the globe as well as ethnic clashes and civil wars. Although we weren't able to verify this, the developer claims that the game will include extensive online options for battling it out over the Internet. Apparently, PC gamers will even be able to duke it out with others using the Dreamcast version.

Guns and Garlic
Naturally, being Frenchmen, the development team has added ample quantities of je ne sais quoi to Conflict Zone. Prior to starting work on Conflict Zone, the team's first game, the MASA Group worked as AI contractors for the French military. The team has incorporated its cutting-edge DirectIA artificial intelligence SDK into the game. The benefits, it is claimed, are revolutionary: not only is the enemy AI completely unpredictable, but it will also feature cognitive anticipation, evolving behaviour and the ability to adapt to match

Our preview code was in French

(1) hélicoptère de civils

Unité perdue
Notre base est attaquée
Ennemis à l'attaque
Unité perdue
Retour au calme

Be careful not to kill the reporters on the battlefield

BULLETS & BAGUETTES

Not content with blowing up small Pacific atolls and foisting Celine Dion (*She's Canadian - Ed*) upon an unsuspecting public, the French are also responsible for some of the most shallow, design-heavy games to ever grace the PC. Without wishing to restart the Battle of Waterloo, France has something of a rich tradition of style overriding content. Heart of Darkness and every Cryo game ever are all fine examples of sexy continental design *sans* gameplay. After all, you can't have the gateau and eat it too. Hopefully, Conflict Zone will be a bit more - how you say? - sophistique.

the player's skill. The developer promise that no two battles will ever be won using the same strategy twice.

In addition, individual units will be more autonomous, minimising tedious micro-management. Players can have up to four commanders on their team, to whom tasks can be delegated. For example, lieutenants can be assigned to develop the base, protect an area or attack an enemy position without requiring constant attention. This innovation allows players to concentrate on the bigger tactical picture, rather than faffing around with trivialities.

Fighters and Foie Gras

Of course, when it comes down to the actual swedging, Conflict Zone misses no tricks. Rather than the usual 'tank rush', Conflict Zone requires plenty of tactical cunning. Like Dark Reign 2, players should take into account terrain and line of sight. There is a serious array of weapons, as

well as air and ground units at your disposal. Realistic terrain deformation and weather effects provide a convincing battlescape. Other notable visual features include damage skins for individual units, as well as special animation for units when idling. The Gallic team has used a Ground Control style engine to great effect - the camera system allows players to zoom in to the midst of the action, or pan out to get a good idea of the overall battlefield. The Alpha version of Conflict Zone we played looks excellent for a work-in-progress, and runs smoothly on our mid-range test-bed.

Despite some niggling stability problems, we're really impressed by our preview copy of Conflict Zone. With some fine-tuning, Conflict Zone has potential to be one of the best strategy games of the year. Formidable!

Command & Conquer
Renegade

WESTWOOD'S THIRDPERSON ACTION ADAPTATION OF C&C DISAPPEARED
FROM THE RADAR SHORTLY AFTER ITS ANNOUNCEMENT LAST YEAR.
NOW IT'S BACK AND **DANIEL STAINES** CAN'T CONTAIN HIS EXCITEMENT...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Westwood

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE
September

URL
www.westwood.com

W estwood has confused a lot of people with Command & Conquer: Renegade. Most automatically assume that Renegade is yet another strategy title – the sequel to the justly belaboured Tiberian Sun, perhaps. However, upon further inspection it becomes apparent that, no, in fact it's not a sequel to Tiberian Sun (thankfully) but instead a completely self-substantiated stand alone action title. Then comes the bewilderment. "It's an action game? Like Rogue Spear? But how will they do that?"

How indeed. Leaping genres with an established franchise like Command & Conquer has always been a suitably risky affair, but Westwood remains conspicuously unconcerned - and for good reason, too. One only has to look at the transformation of the initially adventure-driven Dune at the hands of Westwood back in the early 90s to see that the company knows what its doing when it comes to completely reformatting an established title. Given this fact, one can not help but predict the success of *this* venture.

C&C Music Factory

However, such a prediction is not solely reliant on the previous accolades of Westwood. Indeed, Renegade is shaping up to be a superior game and should be hot competition for other established tactical action franchises like Rogue Spear and Delta Force. Furthermore, while one could be forgiven for cynically assuming that Westwood is merely 'tacking on' the C&C name in order to improve sales on an already existing game, this is happily not the case. In fact, the C&C universe is the central focal point upon which the title revolves and appears to have been the main creative force behind the development process. This is a relief and, more importantly, it's exciting.

Exciting because Westwood is offering a revamped vision of a quickly tiring world. At last fans will be able to appreciate what it's like viewing the universe of C&C from ground zero. Imagine walking, sneaking or charging (depending on how you play) through an amazing, expansive 3D landscape and, as is not uncommon, happening across the trundling metal work horse of the war, the Tiberium Collector. Picture it going about its daily resource gathering business surrounded, as ever, by a collective of defensive tanks and armed infantry - just like in the traditional C&C titles. But then imagine yourself stealthily hijacking the

This is what Sole Survivor should have been

harvester, driving it back to the NOD base undetected by the looming defensive obelisks and entering the refinery to see how Tiberium is processed on the factory floor. And while you're there, why not disable a few power plants, thus making short work of said pesky obelisks? Just imagine being able to do every thing you could do in C&C and Red Alert... *except you're really there*. That's Renegade.

You can't say no

What Renegade offers us is choices on how we'd like to play our game. If it is necessary for an all-out, Schwarzenegger-esque deathsquad assault on an enemy encampment with guns-a-blazin', then tanks, rocket launchers and other assorted heavy weaponry are readily available for the grabbing. However, if stealth is the tactic of choice, then why not hop on a NOD Scout

Bike and do a bit of reconnaissance before sneaking in to a base from the back, undetected and unharmed? It's a real struggle to refrain from mentioning Deus Ex here because I don't want to arouse unwarranted expectations, but really, Renegade does appear to be heading in the same direction.

Now, consider the multiplayer options available for play. Of course, the standard features are all there (Deathmatch, CTF, King of The Hill, etc), but there's another that really sets Renegade apart and makes it shine: co-op play. What Westwood has created here is art, and although that sounds hyperbolic initially (*You think? - Ed*), it quickly loses its exaggerative overtones when one looks at the sheer amount of depth available. If it is permissible to stir your imagination again, picture driving a mammoth tank while your buddy controls

its turrets and missile weaponry. He is blasting away NOD aircraft while you trundle over the crunching corpses of terrorist infantry. A pleasant fancy, and one that will soon be reality thanks to Westwood. (*Hmm, I don't know much about art, but I know I like it - Ed.*)

imagine being able to do everything you could do in C&C and Red Alert... except you're really there. That's Renegade

As this article draws to a close, take time to ponder over all that's been said here and, when you're done, try not to be as phenomenally excited as we are. I bet you can't. Owing to its familiarity, solid play mechanic, technical virtuosity and incredible multiplayer capabilities, Renegade can't help but impress.

Operation Flashpoint

VETEREN GREEN-BERET **BRETT ROBINSON** STRAPS ON HIS KEVLAR ONE MORE TIME TO EXPERIENCE WAR UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL. CAN BOHEMIAN INTERACTIVE CHALLENGE THE MASTER OF THE BAYONET CHARGE?

Traditional development powerhouses like North America and Western Europe have long served as spawning grounds for many of the world's best known developers. However, the infinite cycle of expansion, acquisition and liquidation – eerily similar to more organic processes – has

> The accuracy of the player's shots will be affected by movement and rate of respiration

seen many of these developers become wholly owned subsidiaries of the publishing colossi. With truly independent game development in these arenas becoming increasingly difficult, development in less conventional regions is on the rise.

Unstable Volatiles

Some of the most volatile, war-torn regions on the globe are now home to talented developers whose projects are simply bursting with innovation. One such developer is Prague-based Bohemian Interactive Studios. Having lived behind the Iron Curtain for most of their lives, the team at Bohemian are drawing on their personal experiences and bringing an unprecedented level of realism to their project.

Set on three European islands in 1985, Operation Flashpoint will chronicle a fictional conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. Unsurprisingly, the player will begin the game as a NATO Private, but when it comes to learning the intricacies of military combat, there certainly won't be any substitute for firsthand experience.

A cursory appraisal of the game's screenshots may lead many to conclude that Operation Flashpoint will be just another Delta Force clone. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. Subject matter aside, any similarities between Bohemian's product and Novalogic's voxel-driven franchise will restricted to both titles' ultra-expansive landscapes. In terms of realism and strategic emphasis, Operation Flashpoint will share more gameplay attributes with the likes of Rogue Spear and SWAT 3. A single bullet will be enough to send the player to an early grave, and the accuracy of the player's shots will be affected by factors including weapon type, rate of fire, player movement speed and rate of respiration. When lying prone on the ground, the player's breathing will be very stable and the probability of hitting targets with carefully aimed shots will be

Here comes a Chopper to chop off your head

Babe, back from 'nam, stalked the Hoggit farm

very high. When moving at a leisurely pace, the player's breathing will remain steady and any shots fired will have a relatively high chance of hitting their targets. Conversely, when sprinting over long distances or crawling over the ground at high speeds, the player's breathing will become laboured and the chance of bullets hitting their targets will be slim at best. Furthermore, the player's aim will remain unsteady for several seconds until their breathing becomes less strained.

Early missions will see the player undertake a number of 'lone wolf' missions on foot, following the ambush and murder of the player's squad mates. This traumatic, though cliched, introduction to the game will allow the player to come to grips with basic gameplay mechanics like covert movement and searching of bodies. As the player accrues combat experience, they will learn to command squads of their own, eventually leading machinegunners, snipers and demolitions experts into battle and coordinating their movements. The exceptionally intuitive command interface will allow the player to nominate formations, movement modes and attack positions for squad members. By selecting the squad members then clicking with the mouse, the player will be able to order their comrades to move to any position in sight, or to attack specific targets. The effectiveness of squadmate AI will be such that, should the player be forced to go prone and retreat under heavy fire, the squadmates will automatically hit the dirt, lay down suppressive fire and slowly work their way backward.

Jack of All Trades
While adopting a command role in combat won't be a significant departure from the precedent established by SWAT 3, the option for the player to hop into any unmanned vehicle on the battlefield will. An impressive array of jeeps, transport trucks, armoured personnel carriers, tanks, and attack helicopters will definitely be ripe for the picking.
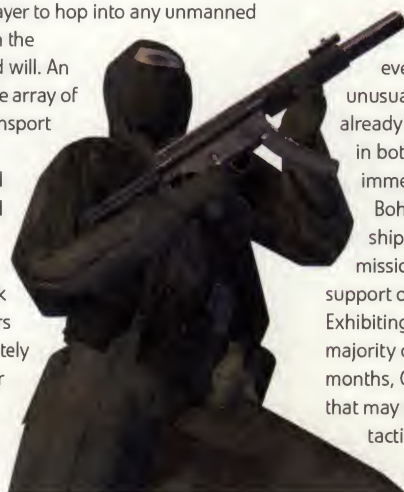
Moreover, in many cases the player will be able to occupy a number of positions in each vehicle. For example, when expropriating a tank, the player will have the option of sitting in the commander's chair and issuing movement and targeting orders, jumping into the driver's seat and steering, or manning the gunner's cupola and firing away with abandon. Similarly, in helicopters the player will be able to man the pilot and co-pilot/gunner seats. Should the player wish to do so, they will be able to stop their vehicle and resume the battle on foot.

Operation Flashpoint is expected to ship in May and is, as such, still in the alpha phase of development. But even at this early stage, it is an unusually stable game, and one that has already unerringly bested its competitors in both the realism and player immersion stakes. According to Bohemian, Operation Flashpoint will ship with an extremely comprehensive mission editor, and full multiplayer support over LAN and the internet. Exhibiting so much more potential than the majority of games we've seen in the last six months, Operation Flashpoint is one title that may very well set the standard for the tactical action genre for years to come.

Warcraft III

WAR, UGH, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING... UNLESS IT'S DONE BY BLIZZARD.
ANTHONY FORDHAM STOPS PLAYING SERIOUS SAM
LONG ENOUGH TO EXAMINE THE CRAFTMEISTER'S LATEST...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Blizzard

PUBLISHER
Havas

AVAILABLE
4th Qtr

URL
www.blizzard.com

B lizzard has had a lot of trouble deciding exactly what to do with the ageing Warcraft license. After the spectacular success of Warcraft II, in many ways *the* RTS of the early to mid nineties, the developer has been thrashing around for a suitable new direction.

Back in the nineties, the 'zeitgeist of the times' - as one 'online site' put it - held that for an RTS to be successful, it had to be sci-fi. The likes of Dark Reign and Total Annihilation replaced orcs with plasma tanks, and so Blizzard followed suit, with the excellent Starcraft.

Meanwhile, the Warcraft universe was not dead, although it was seriously ill. Blizzard toyed for an embarrassing amount of time with a graphical adventure concept called Warcraft Adventures, featuring the exploits of a young orc named Thrall, brought up by cruel and evil humans. When the Internet started harping on about the death of the adventure game, and when sales of such multi-million dollar titles as Toonstruck could be counted on two-and-a-half hands, Warcraft Adventures was axed, and a long and sullen silence settled over the Orcish world of Draenor.

When Orcs are a good thing

However, with the birth of the new millennium, Blizzard announced Warcraft III - subtitled A Return to Traditional Family Values. Except that, instead of a familiar grunt-rushin' RTS extravaganza, Warcraft III was described as a Role Playing Strategy.

With a roaming, configurable camera, Warcraft III was to focus mainly on the adventures of a group of heroes, who would go questing about the place and occasionally pick up extra units to assist in battles. Base-building was to be minimal, and there was to be a heavy emphasis on scripted quest events.

But then Blizzard decided this wasn't going to work at all, so the developer junked its design document and rebuilt the whole game. The camera became fixed in a traditional top-down perspective, the heroes were scaled back, town building was resurrected and resource gathering was added. Now Blizzard says while there will still be NPCs, quests, scripted events and everything else we expect in an RPG, there will now be a large amount of RTS action a la Starcraft.

Then Blizzard said that there would be five races: Orcs, Humans, Undead, Night

> Warcraft III at this stage will combine the furious tactical speed of Starcraft with the roleplaying elements and special item questing of Diablo II

Elves and Demons, offering unprecedented complexities of play, since when any two sides were allied in multiplayer games, new units and new abilities would also be unlocked. However, recently Blizzard has decided to ditch the Demons, and go with only four races.

The story for Warcraft III will be simple. The Burning Legion - evil demon things from the sky - come down to Draenor and start putting a bit of stick about. Blizzard says the character of Thrall - he of the ill-fated Warcraft Adventures - will form the centre of the Orc campaign.

The Paladin was swiftly abducted by aliens

Human Paladin

Taking a castle For Great Justice

All Your Bases Are Belong to Us

Base building, while included, will still be less significant than in earlier Warcraft titles. Warcraft III will revolve around the hero units. Each hero will have a set of statistics - Strength, Agility and Intelligence - and these stats will increase as the hero completes quests. Experience points will be distributed automatically based on the various different hero classes (with Warlord and Paladin confirmed at this stage). So when a Magic User levels up, his intelligence will increase far more than his strength.

In the singeplayer campaigns - there will be four, one for each race - heroes will carry over into subsequent missions, while in multiplayer heroes can be purchased, obviously at a far higher cost than normal units.

This allows for an extra level of depth in multiplayer games. Blizzard's Bill Roper explains how choosing heroes over standard units will open up a whole new set of tactical choices:

"I watched an interesting game not too long ago between Rob Pardo and another Blizzard employee that really said something to me about the depth of these

units and gameplay," he says. "Rob decided to go with smaller units and the other person went the hero route. So Rob and he met in battle and Rob had six knights and the other guy had a hero with some abilities and some peons.

"After a long battle the hero was dead and Rob had two knights left, so he headed towards the other player's town. Turns out the other player had enough resources left that he was able to resurrect his hero in town and was able to successfully defend it against the two knights. It was fun to watch."

Heroes will have inventories and will be able to carry a number of items such as spells and special weapons. Warcraft III at this stage will combine the furious tactical speed of Starcraft with the roleplaying elements and special item questing of Diablo II.

Warcraft III will hopefully be with us toward the end of this year. Blizzard *says* it has finalised which elements will be included in the final game, so let's hope this time they stick with them. Warcraft III has the potential to add new complexity to a frankly tired genre. Don't let the Orcs put you off, this could be big. Especially in Korea.

HAVE YOU GOT THE KNAACK?

Now here's a novel idea, hahaha. In the tradition of such great reads as Doom: Knee Deep in the Dead and Myst: Book of Atrus, Blizzard is pumping good money into a series of novels - not books, but novels - based on the Warcraft universe. In a stunning coup, they've snared New York Times Best Seller Richard Knaak, author of such American classics as Catcher in the Rye and Babar Goes to Hollywood. Bill Roper waxes lyrical:
"It's a great book by a veteran writer, Richard Knaak, who's been on the Times bestseller list with Dragonlance
books. It's just the first in a series of books about our games that are coming out. We went out and got established writers like Charles Grant and Jeff Grubb to do these. Jeff has also done a lot of D&D work for Wizards of the Coast. We put together a writing bible so these writers would have a good basis to work from, but they're free to be creative to some extent too. In this first book some of the events that were hinted at in Warcraft 2 are explained. It's good stuff." Charles Grant *and* Jeff Grubb. Forget Harry Potter, *this* is the future of literature.

Gadgets Special
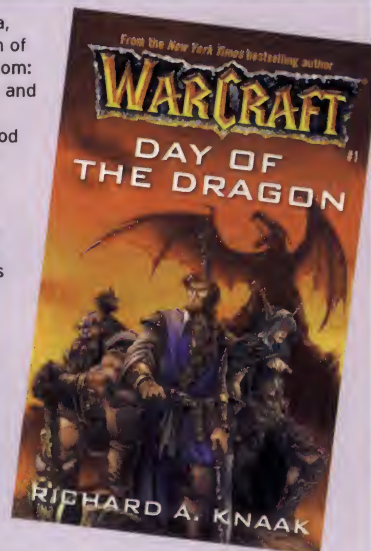
GAME BOY ADVANCE
www.nintendo.com

Building on the enormous success of the original Game Boy Colour, Nintendo are mere months away from releasing the all-new Game Boy Advance. The new model boasts a more powerful architecture, larger screen and backwards computability with original Game Boy games. Games like Mario Kart, Game Boy Tennis Advance, Silent Hill and, I kid you not, Sonic the HedgeHog will be available at launch. We can't wait.

SEGA-PACE SET-TOP BOX
www.pace.co.uk

Pace Micro, the world's largest set top box manufacturer, is partnering with Sega in an effort to invade living rooms around the world. It's the world's first web-enabled digital set top box to incorporate powerful video game capabilities. The new device will mesh Pace's expertise in broadcast technology with Sega's extensive games portfolio, integrating Sega's Dreamcast platform into Pace's digital home gateway. The hybrid device is designed to provide digital TV customers with on-demand access to hundreds of games. Available for all major digital TV platforms - including cable, satellite, xDSL and digital terrestrial - it is envisaged that consumers will access the games in either a pay per-play format or hire games for a fixed time period.

SONY AIBO GENERATION 2 ERS-210
www.sony.com.au

Costing over AU$5000, AIBO is Sony's more sophisticated answer to the drop-kick-inviting Furby. AIBO responds to over 50 voice commands, can learn from experience and, most impressively, can even express a wide range of emotions. In its autonomous mode, AIBO can act on pre-programmed impulses to play, seek or sleep. Each AIBO will develop its own unique personality. The next-generation AIBO is significantly more advanced than its predecessor; not only is it more agile and robust, but it also includes an integrated, nose-mounted camera. It is also considerably cheaper.

MAC G4 TITANIUM POWERBOOK
www.apple.com.au

Let the hate mail begin! Yes, this is a Mac. Yes, all Macs are, as they say, the Devil. But we just couldn't go past the Titanium G4. It's so... slick. So cool. So styled. So thin. With such a big, wide screen. And a slot-loading DVD drive. The name Titanium isn't just flummery, by the way. This notebook really is coated in Titanium, the ultra-light, ultra-strong metal that takes steel and aluminium and pummels them mercilessly into the dirt. The 15.2 inch screen makes DVD a joy to behold and the firewire connection makes this G4 a useful on-the-road video editing suite. Of course we would never BUY one. But if it was our birthday, say, and someone wanted to give us a present...

PALM VX
www.palm.com.au

Okay, so its been around for a bit, but in the world of PDAs we strongly believe you just can't go past the Palm Vx. It's light. It's sheathed in sexy steel. It's oh-so-21st-Century-thin. With 8Mb of memory it holds all your important dates, names, places, and more than a few funky little games. Impress people with your mastery of the Graffiti handwriting recognition system. Effortlessly attach any of a dozen funky addons from MP3 players to GPS tracking systems. Surf the web. Write a best-selling novel. Beat off attackers. The Palm Vx is truly the PDA that can do anything.

SONY MN50 LCD MONITOR
www.sony.com.au

In the beginning was the word, and the word was 'drool'. When space is at a premium and style is paramount, the MN50 is the only possible solution. A svelte 15 inches, this display - calling it a monitor is just so gauche darling - takes the revolutionary step of whacking all the plugs and most of the electronics in a separate media box that goes under the desk. This leaves you with the bare minimum up top. Super thin, super light, and most importantly black. Need more? The Park Hyatt Sydney, one of the most exclusive (and expensive) hotels in Australia, uses this display at Reception, Cashiers, in fact anywhere guests can see and be impressed by it. Truly a thing of beauty.

Gadgets Special

Gadgets Special

SONY NWE3 NETWORK WALKMAN
www.sony.com.au

Want to get on the road with your tunes but just can't handle all that removable media nonsense? Then the NWE3 is clearly for you. Solid state, free from the burden of moving parts, the NWE3 features a generous 64Mb of memory. Interestingly, it uses Sony's proprietary compression format ATRAC3. However, all necessary software is included, to rip CDs and convert MP3 files. And the NWE3 only weighs 33 grams, so it can even be smuggled onboard the Space Shuttle.

LG MP3 PLAYER
www.lge.com.au

To paraphrase Bogart, of all the MP3 players in the world, why did we pick this one? Because it is - as the spec sheet claims - full-featured. With intro-scan, bookmarking, the inclusion of two 16Mb flash cards, an excellent software bundle and whimsical style, the simply-named LG MP3 Player has it all. You're also free to toss out the dodgy earphones included and plug in something rather more beefy, which is always a plus.

SHARP MT831 MINIDISC RECORDER
www.sharp.net.au

Real Audiophiles Don't Listen to MP3. It's a universal truth, ineluctable, indisputable. Real Audiophiles, when they hit the road, listen to minidisc. And this little number from Sharp is a thing of pure silvery beauty. On its launch it was the lightest MD recorder in its class, and there's nothing out today that seriously competes. With battery life measured in days, the recorder offers a sample rate converter so you can record digitally straight off your DATs, 16Mbits of DRAM offering 120 second shock-protection, and a 24-bit ATRAC. Very nice.

TERAPIN CD VIDEO RECORDER
www.goterapin.com

The Terapin is the first consumer-level Video CD recorder. The unit is as easy to use as a VCR (and it has no clock to set!) - all you do is put in a blank CD-R or CD-RW disc, and you can record direct from broadcast TV or transfer old recordings from video tape to CD. S-Video and composite connections are available. The mastered CD can then be used in any multimedia enabled PC, VCD, DVD or Terapin player. Although Video CD quality pales in comparison to the DivX and DVD format, it does compare favourably to VHS.

FUJITSU PLASMA TV
www.fujitsu.com.au

Welcome to Fantasy Time. That's right, everyone can have Fantasy Time for the space of one paragraph. This Plasma TV costs more than a Hyundai Excel, but gives an infinitely superior picture. Wide screen, the Plasma TV uses pockets of gas superheated into the plasma state, providing the clearest, most natural picture you'll ever see. Never go to the movies again. The inclusion of two fat stereo speakers and a plethora of outputs for connection to your Boston DT6000 speaker system, make this the telly of your dreams.

SONY DVPF5 PORTABLE DVD PLAYER
www.sony.com.au

Be the most popular person at the next slumber party! Bring a DVD player with you, tucked away in your handbag. The size of a DVD wallet, the DVPF5 has everything you expect from a full-size player. Optical out, DTS decoding, ability to play NTSC and PAL discs, and a remote so powerful it's called a Remote Commander. The DVPF5 even has a laser-link transmitter for AV equipment, so should your next door neighbour have a whole bunch of expensive laser link-up technology in his living room, you won't even have to bring cables. Stylish and convenient!

Gadgets Special
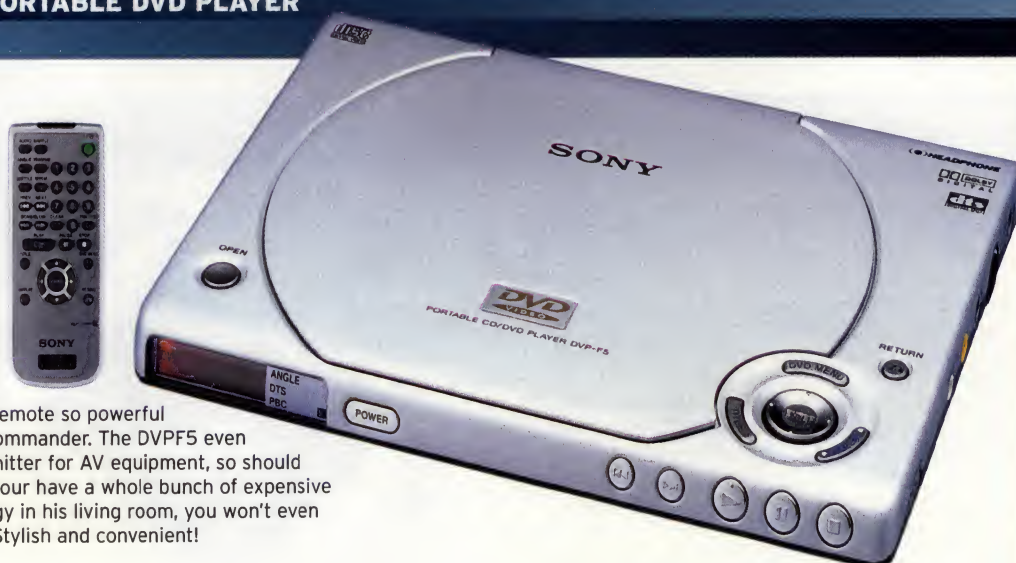
MOBILE

NOKIA 6210
www.nokia.com.au

If you don't have a mobile, every time you step out of the house you risk missing a call that could change your life. What's more, modern mobile telephones feature numerous extras to make life that little bit more bearable. The Nokia 6210 is a WAP phone, in that you can use it to browse a sort of cut-down, black and white version of the internet over a slow and unreliable connection to retrieve such vital information as movie session times and the current Liberty One share price. Like all of Nokia's phones, the 6210 is light, sexy, has excellent battery life, a variety of amusing ringing tones - through which you can scroll, one at a time, to endear yourself to your fellow commuters - and no antenna to get caught on other personal items, such as your wallet, undies, handcuffs, Glock .45 etc.
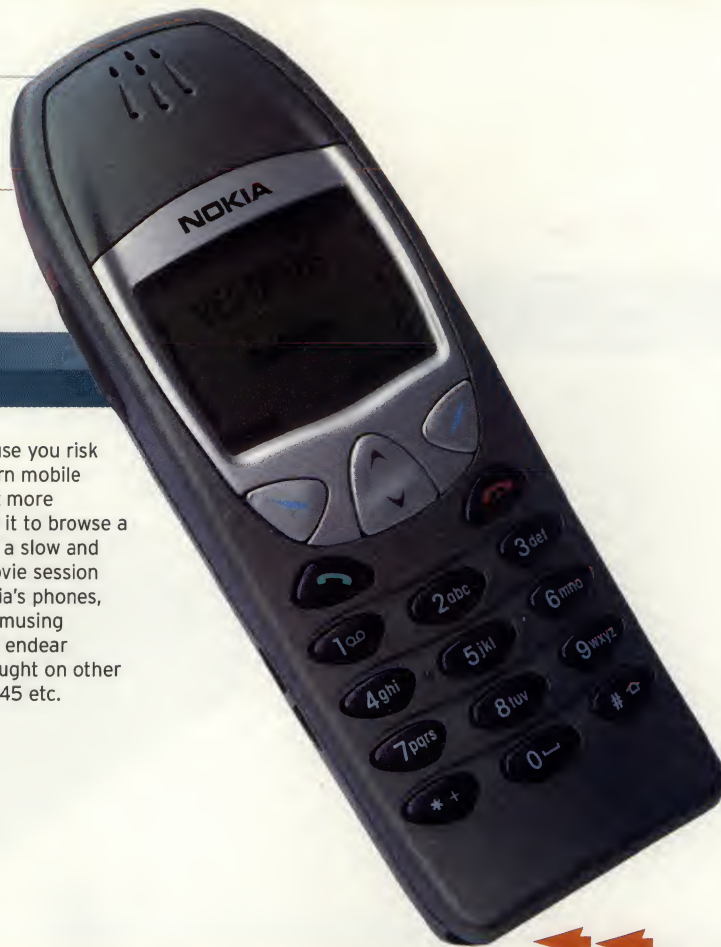
ERICSSON R380S
www.ericsson.com.au

And now! Hyperbole from the marketing geniuses of Ericsson! To quote: "the R380s will become an icon product in the business corporate market and must for technology enthusiasts." Well perhaps not an ICON, but this phone is certainly appealing. Flip open the keyboard and a landscape PDA screen is revealed. The R380s (lowercase s if you please) allows you to download email right from your company server without all that tedious mucking about with PC-synchronisation. Of course, the R380s plugs right in to your PC, so all your important notes, memoranda and little lunchtime haikus can nestle together on this delicious little phone. It also plays Tetris, the very definition of cool.

MOTOROLA ACCOMPLI
www.motorola.com.au

"In a world powered by silicon chips and microprocessors, cutting edge personal networking devices make the perfect accessories for the aficionados of hi-tech!" cries Motorola while introducing the funky little Accompli. What this exactly means, we at PCPP have been unable to determine. But this phone combines many of the features of a typical mobile with those of a PDA and comes out all the stronger. With WAP capabilities, the Internet is only a seven inch LCD screen away, and a two-way English-Chinese dictionary helps teach you one of the oldest and most culturally rich languages on the planet. Once you've mastered Mandarin and Cantonese fear not, the Accompli also recognises all forms of Chinese handwriting! And English too, obviously.
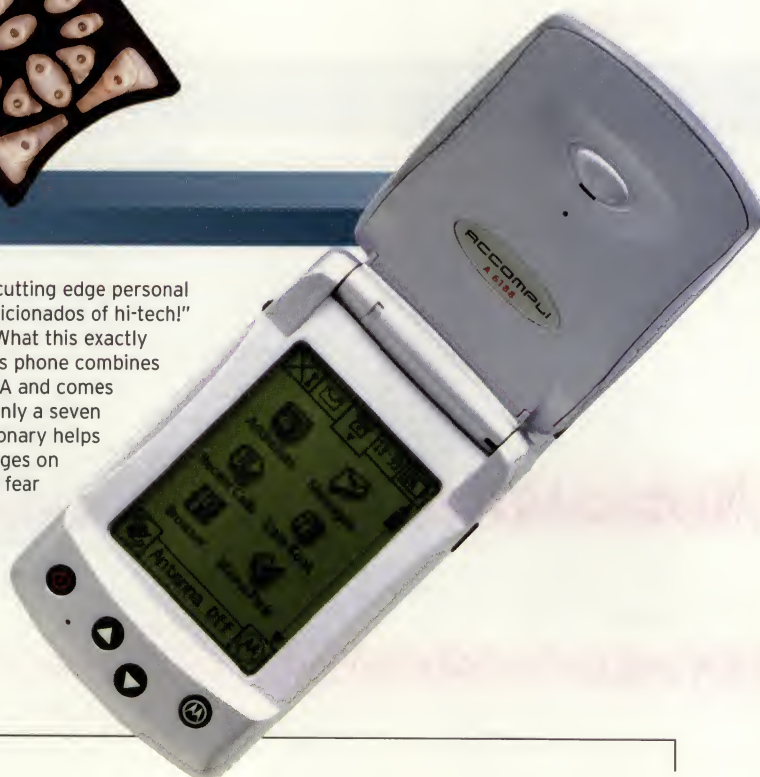
ARBORTECH HOVERBOARD
www.airboard.com.au

It's not Dean Kamen's 'Ginger/IT' - the revolutionary transport invention that will either save or destroy the world - but this easy-to-use hoverboard could still be the next Big Thing. Shown originally at the Olympic opening ceremony, the ArborTech Hoverboard has the potential to revolutionise personal transport. Guaranteed to make Marty McFly wannabes wet their pants. Hammering along pretending you're not perched atop what is basically a floating lawnmower, you use the mighty weight of your mighty body to steer around stationary obstacles, such as the elderly. A fan-guard prevents the accidental aspiration of small children and most family pets, although special care should be taken when 'boarding near lapdogs, budgies and hamsters. The company name is confusing though, because 'Arbor' means 'Trees'. What gives?

NEW MINI
www.mini.co.uk

Immortalised in The Italian Job, the original Mini is one of the most memorable and acclaimed automobile designs of the 20th Century. Now owned by BMW, Rover are releasing an updated version of the iconic Mini. Although the new car is unmistakably a Mini, it is considerably larger and offers a range of high tech, 21st Century features. Recreate those famous hurtling-down-the-twisty-mountain-road scenes in so many B-grade Italian sleuth flicks. Pretend to be Mr Bean. On second thoughts, maybe you shouldn't get into that sort of thing. In any case, we're hanging out for the supercharged Cooper variant.

SOLOTREK PERSONAL EX-SKELETOR FLYING DEVICE
www.solotrek.com

Developed by Millennium Jet Inc, the Solotrek works like a Harrier Jump Jet, utilising a VTOL or vertical-take-off-and-landing system. Only instead of jet propulsion, the XFV uses propellers to lift the aviator off the ground. Once strapped into the 7.5-foot tall vehicle, the engines will turn the overhead duct fans at 3,500 to 4,000 rpm, providing adequate thrust to propel you into the air with a cry of "YAAAAGH!". Once airborne, you can zip over treetops at a top speed of 140kph for 250 kilometres on a single tank before plummeting powerless out of the sky as you run out of fuel. Average cruising speeds are between 74 to 120kph, and Solotrek can climb as high as 3,048 meters. While the company has not said when they will market the vehicle, there are numerous alleged applications for private use. What Millennium Jet means by 'ex-skeletor' is not clear, but we welcome any He-Man references in modern aviation.

Gadgets Special
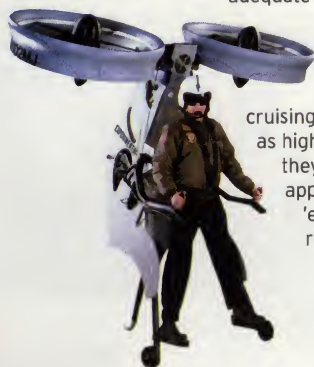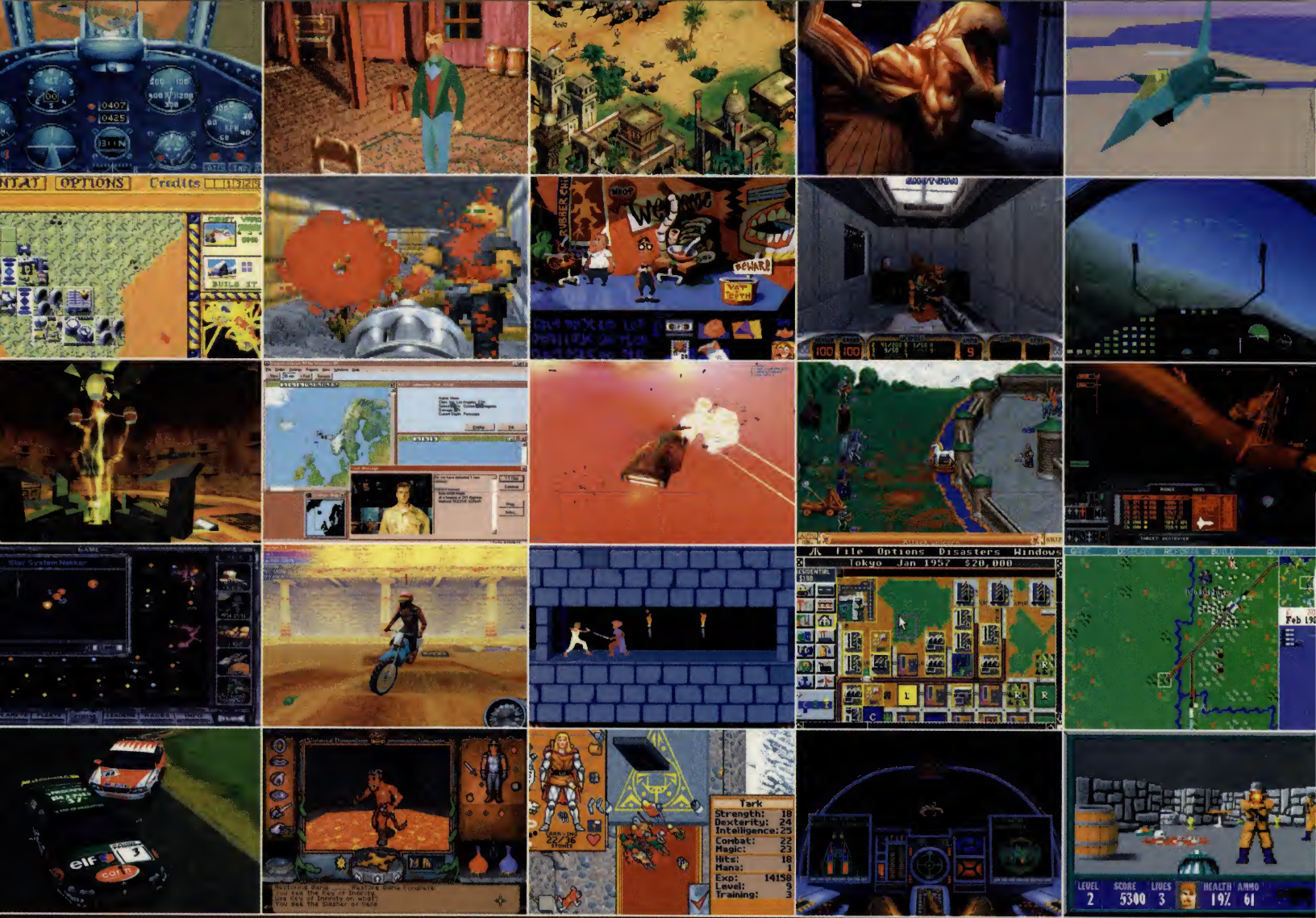
THE HISTORY OF
IS THE HISTORY OF PC GAMES
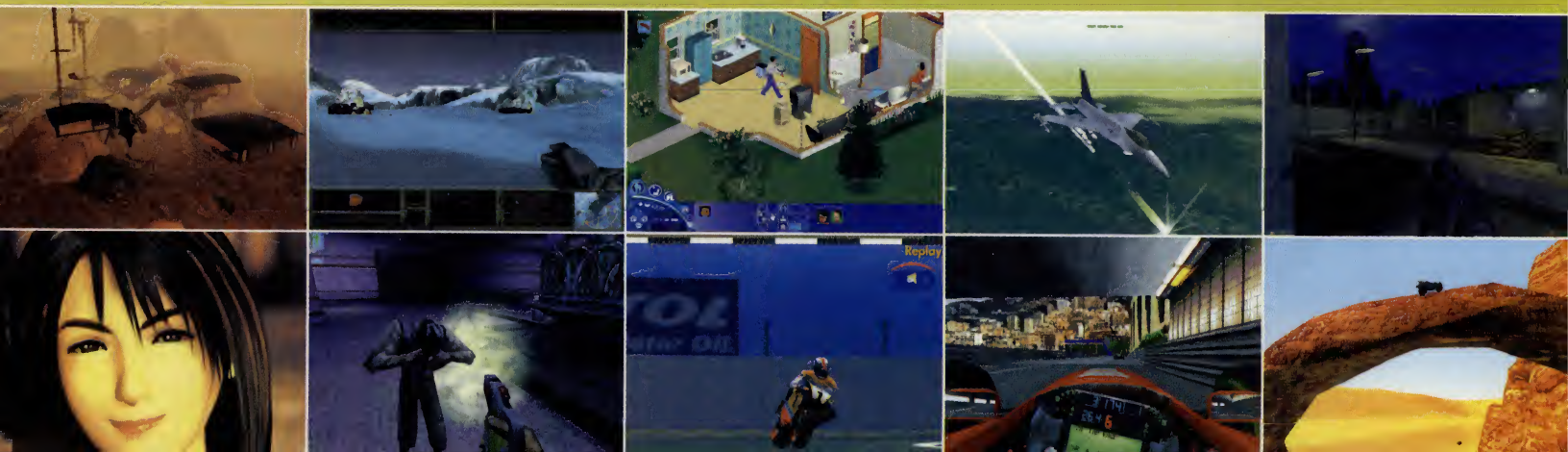
PC POWERPLAY

Five years doesn't sound like a long time. Indeed, in many industries fives years is nothing. It's only halfway through a ten-year plan. It's only a third of the life-cycle of a Junior Vice President of Marketing. And yet, five years is four generations of a 3D engine. Five years is the period between the first, halting single-spin CD-ROMs and 16x DVD drives with 5.1 channel surround. The period between the 2Mb Trident VGA adaptor and the Hercules GeForce2 Ultra. The period between Duke3D and Giants.

Five years ago, we were in the dark ages. No decent internet. No decent online servers. Unless you were fat, pale and destined to die early of mature-age diabetes, you weren't a gamer. Five years ago, to all intents and purposes, Killcreek didn't exist.

And then, into this Dark Age came a light. That's right, PC PowerPlay. As James Cottee would say, a magazine written with not only journalistic verve and literary wit, but also the important ingredient of love. Without love, PC PowerPlay would be nothing. Without PC PowerPlay, Australian gaming would be... different. It would certainly be less informed.

Come with us now as we part the curtain of time and look down the long corridor of history. Watch the old faces swim from the mists of memory; Ben Mansill, March Stepnik, Spoonman, Major Ian. This is PC PowerPlay. This is Australian Gaming.

So it was that following John Howard's victory at the polls, Next Publishing's only logical step was to create the definitive Australian gaming magazine. The Company struggled to find a magazine title that would evoke the essence of gaming - play - and also sound powerful. Tempers grew short. Names such as PC Dominator, PC Gamedude and PC Joystick were all rejected as being odd, childish or stupid. PC Watershed was too obscure, PC Gamesmag too obvious.

Finally though, the most powerful and playful name turned out to be, oddly enough, PC PowerPlay, and to celebrate this, Ben Mansill was hired as launch editor of what was to become a behemoth of gaming news, and hugely controversial Top 100 lists.

PowerPlay launched with Duke Nukem on the cover. Inside, a two-page preview gushed that Duke3D would clearly be the most immersive, the most realistic, and most kickarse 3D shooter ever, certainly better than the upcoming Quake. A few pages later, Quake was previewed, as the most realistic, most immersive and certainly most arse-kicking 3D shooter ever, certainly much better than Duke3D. And indeed, the Duke vs Quake debate would not end until the release of Unreal, two years later, sounding the final death-knell for the gum-chewing one.

Flushed with success after the first issue, PowerPlay went from strength to strength. In 1996, the mag gave Australia authoritative opinions on such classics as Diablo - where mouse-clicks maketh the man - and Red Alert. Lara Croft also met a generation of healthy young Australians in 96, who all helped her become the highest-grossing female entertainer of all time, despite not actually being a real person.

Across the sweeping background of the Quake vs Duke3D debate - which wasn't helped by the fact PC PowerPlay actually quite liked both games for

1996

MAY PCPP #1
Quake and Duke 3D demos previewed
Reviews: Grand Prix 2: 9/10 Descent 2: 9/10 Civilisation 2: 9/10

JUNE PCPP #2
Direct X released to the public
Reviews: Bad Mojo: 82% Zork Nemesis: 86% Terra Nova: 91%

JULY PCPP #3
Red Alert revealed at E3
Reviews: Duke Nukem 3D: 90% The Settlers 2: 87% I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream: 79%

AUGUST PCPP #4
Quake shareware released and reviewed
Reviews: ARL Rugby 96: 88% Normality: 78 % Gender Wars: 72 %

SEPTEMBER PCPP #5
We interview id's Mike Wilson on Quake and Quake 2
Reviews: Time Commando: 93 % Close Combat: 72% Firefight: 82%

OCTOBER PCPP #6
John Romero leaves id to form own company
Reviews: Quake: 92% Z: 72 % The Pandora Directive: 93 %

Quake vs Duke3D was the source of endless debate

different reasons - the initial brace of sequels took their first faltering, then increasingly more confident steps. Grand Prix 2 dulled the pain for thousands of Adelaide gamers still reeling from Kennett's treachery. And Civilization II brought empire-management kicking and screaming into the late nineties, paving the way for dozens of spinoffs, ripoffs and Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri A Brian Reynolds Game.

PC PowerPlay has always loved big stompy robots, and even though we started every review except Mechwarrior 4 with a variation

reviewing boxed, finished games. The mag was - and continues to be - about the bleeding edge. The newest of the new. A global network of tiny gnomes lead by March Stepnik regularly infiltrate every major development studio to steal early pre-Alpha code. We play that code, so we can bring you news the very second it comes up.

In 1996, we broke the news of a new company called Ion Storm, formed by a then-relatively-obscure ex-member of id Software named John Romero. March and his gnomes overhead Romero talking excitedly about a

LARA BECAME THE HIGHEST-GROSSING FEMALE ENTERTAINER OF ALL TIME, DESPITE NOT ACTUALLY BEING A REAL PERSON

on 'there's something sexy about fifty-ton battle machines', the Mech games have always had a special place in the magazine. In the very second issue, Editor Ben Mansill was pleased to see Sierra release Earthsiege 2, kicking off the mid-to-late-nineties with a definitive stompybot simulator. But even in the beginning, PC PowerPlay wasn't just about

game that would destroy Quake, Quake II and all future potential iterations of Quake. It was to be called Daikatana: The Best Game Ever, and we were encouraged with increasing regularity by Romero to 'suck it down.'

Also Tiberian Sun got a mention in 1996. Almost like an omen.

The first ever PC PowerPlay Christmas party had gone off without a hitch, except for a certain fresh-faced young 22-year-old with the initials DW holding up traffic on Redfern Road at three in the morning with his impassioned speech on the evils of the flannelette shirt in contemporary music. A new year stretched ahead of an increasingly confident magazine. And what a year it was to be.

The shape of gaming was changing. Quake had shown Internet play to be a significant force, and with the release of Ultima Online, the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game revolution was in full swing. Early days though, were somewhat shaky.

Players bred on a diet of firstperson shooters and dungeon-hack click-fests such as Diablo, thought player-killing to be the very height of culture and sophistication. To PowerPlay's amusement - we never take sides, ahem - the Player-Killer War of UO raged on, with

WE WERE PLEASED TO INTRODUCE GAMERS TO A GREAT LITTLE AUSSIE BATTLER IN THE FORM OF DARK REIGN

thousands of newbies frustrated at spending ninety bucks on a game, twenty-five bucks on memberships and ISPs, and five hours developing a character, only to be mercilessly

smashed to bits by a super-powerful mage called l33+Hax0r{2000} after unwisely saying "Hello."

1997 also marked at least one of the many beginnings of the Games Violence debate. Not content with denying thousands of teens the release of late-night softcore porn on Channel 9, the new conservative government also decided games were too violent. Carmageddon was a case in point; the old

1997

MAY PCPP #13
Dark Reign beta announced to huge responses
Reviews: X-Wing Vs. Tie Fighter: 93% Star Trek Generations: 83 % Need for Speed 2: 90%

JUNE PCPP #14
John Romero is beaten at Quake by Hungarian woman, Kornelia Takacs. Happily, he refrained from partnering with her.
Reviews: Dark Reign: 94% Commanche 3: 80%

JULY PCPP #15
The first of the many, many Tomb Raider sequels is revealed at E3
Reviews: Carmageddon: 90% LBA 2: 84% X-COM Apocalypse: 93%

AUGUST PCPP #16
Hexen 2 revealed to the press
Reviews: Dungeon Keeper: 85% Warlords III: 89% Moto Racer: 94%

SEPTEMBER PCPP #17
Dennis 'Thresh' Fong raises to gamer celebrity status
Reviews: Age of Empires: 93% Lands of Lore II: 92% Starfleet Academy: 92%

OCTOBER PCPP #18
We delve into the seedy underworld of software piracy in an exclusive expose
Reviews: Jedi Knight: 95% Total Annihilation: 98% Fallout: 89%.

Quake 2: the cause of all violence in the world

duffers so out of tune with the hip kids of today took offence at a game that let you run down pregnant mothers begging for their lives in the street. Doom was also pilloried, although very little was said about Quake II, possibly due to the fact that the only remarkable thing about it as a game was that it was remarkably unremarkable.

After realising that Virtual Reality was a non-starter, PC PowerPlay turned instead to a far more promising technology: 3D acceleration. Early cards such as the 3D Blaster with a whopping 4Mb of onboard video memory were diverting, but too expensive for anyone but the enthusiasts. Initially few games supported 3D acceleration, and it wasn't until the release of the Voodoo2 that 3D games started to look seriously pretty.

In 1997, a man named Derek Smart continued in his quest to see his game, Battlecruiser 3000, achieve first critical and popular success, and eventually just a decent review anywhere. Unfortunately, PC PowerPlay was not the mag to give Derek his coveted favourable review, because his game was an unfinished, buggy mess. This did not deter Derek, far from it. To this day, armed

with his PhD in an as-yet unidentified discipline, he continues to champion the cause of the lone developer. One man, one game, that's basically what Dr Derek Smart is all about. We wish him continuing luck.

As for RTS fans, PC PowerPlay was pleased to introduce gamers to a great little Aussie battler in the form of Dark Reign. Sure, the tanks looked like cockroaches, the resources never ran out and the enemy AI built its base in exactly the same patchwork pattern every time, but it was fast, furious, it had good online support, and it was Australian. It made us proud. Total Annihilation, on the other hand, made us very excitable. We liked it so much we gave it 98%, a score matched by few games since. It was the first of the 3D RTS games, and to this day remains one of the few really good ones.
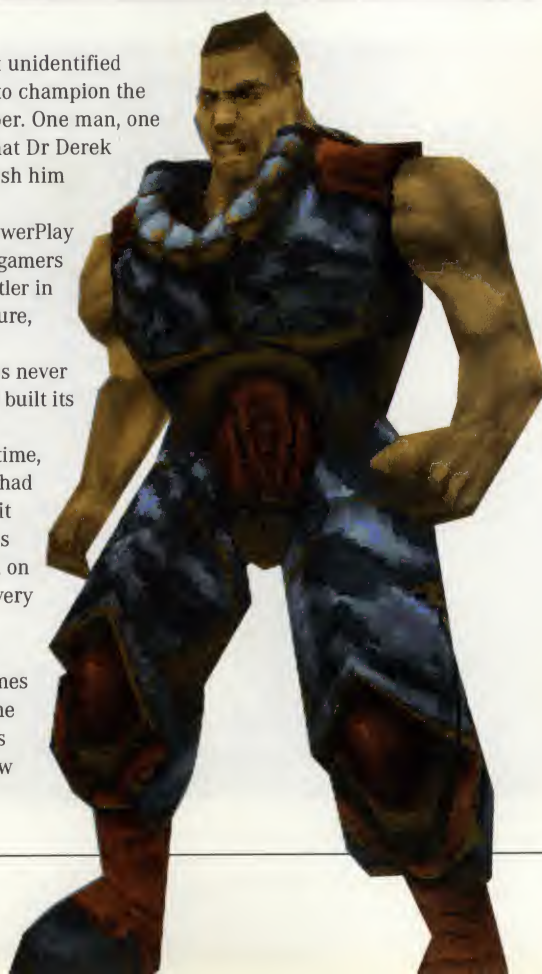
1998 YEAR OF THE SHOOTIST

Once again, the PowerPlay Christmas party was... not exactly ruined, but certainly marred by an impromptu tabletop performance by a young man wearing only a pair of Daikatana boxers and a Pulp T-shirt. Scarred but unbeaten, the PC PowerPlay crew went to work, facing a year that had the first crop of really, really important titles.

Unfortunately, Tiberian Sun got another mention in 1998, but this was quickly made up for with the excellent Blizzard offering of Starcraft. Following on their Warcraft titles, Starcraft got rid of the orcs, added an extra race, and took Korea by storm. In fact, as alluded to by Hugh in last month's tech editorial, an entire industry has sprung up in

Asia, a network of interlinked gaming rooms in every port and regional capital from Bangkok to Beijing, from Singapore to Seoul.

1998 also saw the first of the remakes. Westwood, flushed with both the success of Red Alert and the embarrassment of Command and Conquer: Sole Survivor, released Dune 2000, a relatively competent rehash of the RTS that in many ways started it all. The fat guy from Sliders who looks like Pavarotti was a particular highlight.

PowerPlay caters for all gamers with equal amounts of love, and Grand Prix Legends was worth that love, because it remains one of the great racing sims of all time. Discarding the awesome power and corporate sponsorship of modern Formula One, GP Legends stepped

back in time to when cars were cigar tubes on four bike wheels, hurtling around gravel tracks and frequently spinning into the crowd and killing dozens. That was racing.

But 1998 will surely be remembered as Year of the Shooter. With 3D accelerators being replaced by all-in-one 2D/3D cards such as nVidia's TNT, firstperson games entered a renaissance. From out of the wilderness of Blood and Hexen II came first SiN, which wasn't that great, then Unreal, which was so great we gave it 98% just like TA, then Thief, which redefined FPS shooting, and finally Half-Life.

Half-Life as you know, as we know, as everybody knows, is an important game. No other game did what Half-Life did with the

1998

MAY PCPP #25
AMD enters the gaming arena with their K6 line of CPU's... and thus begins the war with Intel
Reviews: Starcraft: 92% Forsaken: 92% Die By The Sword: 92%

JUNE PCPP #26
Well, really- Unreal. 98%. Is there any more to say?
Reviews: Unreal: 98% Might and Magic VI: 91% Monster Truck Madness 2: 82%

JULY PCPP #27
3D Realms announce that they are changing the engine for their 'upcoming' Duke Nukem Forever... and we're still waiting for it
Reviews: Mech Commander: 86% The X-Files: 76%

AUGUST PCPP #28
Disgruntled slacker guru, D Coupland, announced he's writing a book about Lara Croft. Strange.
Reviews: Dune 2000: 87% Commandos: 82% KKND 2: 65%

SEPTEMBER PCPP #29
SiN is revealed unto the gaming press and looks to be a great title all round... too bad about the bugs
Reviews: Grid Wars: 81% SWAT 2: 75% The Creed: 86%

OCTOBER PCPP #30
The first portable MP3 player is announced to much controversy. And this was before Napster, too...
Reviews: Colin McRae Rally: 94% Motocross Madness: 94%

Half-Life: not as big as European Air War?
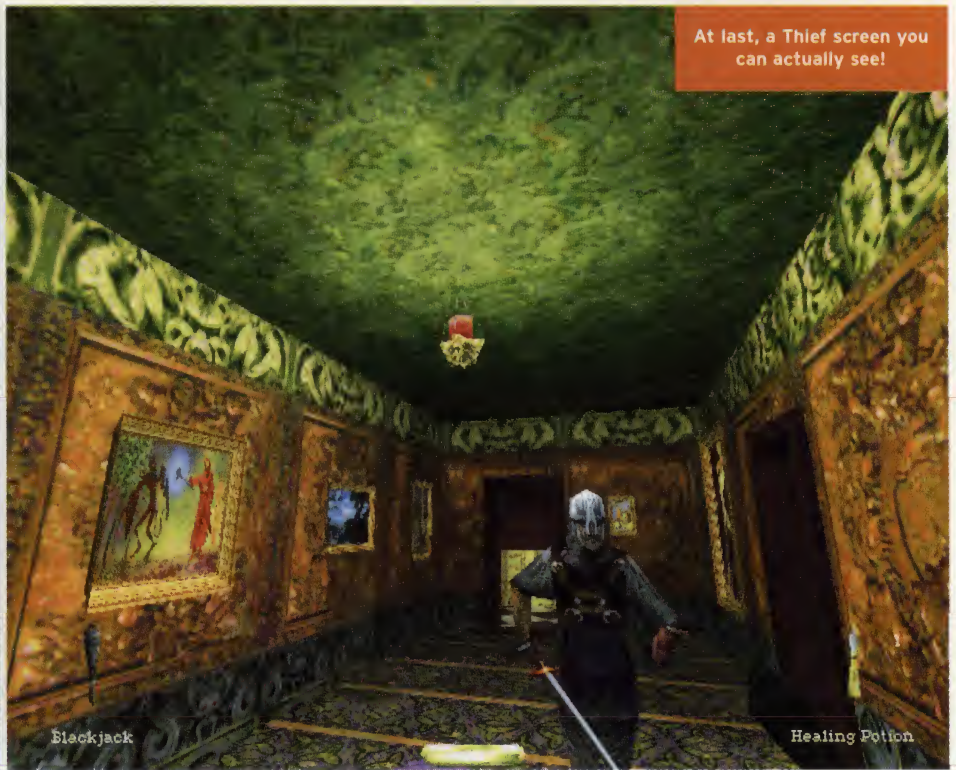
At last, a Thief screen you can actually see!

Blackjack

Healing Potion

NOVEMBER PCPP #31

PC PowerPlay

DOGFIGHT! EUROPEAN AIR WAR

Two words, one incredible gaming experience: Half Life
Reviews: Half Life 98% European Air War: 94% Grim Fandango: 91%

DECEMBER PCPP #32

PC PowerPlay

POWERSLIDE

2 CDs!

The only time a steering wheel ever featured on our cover - one time too many
Reviews: Powerslide: 93%, Fallout 2: 88%

1999

JANUARY PCPP #33

PC PowerPlay

FALCON 4.0 KING OF GAMES

Quake 3 unveiled in all its curved glory
Reviews: Falcon 4: 98%, Thief: 95%, Railroad Tycoon 2: 91%

FEBRUARY PCPP #34

PC PowerPlay

3D ACCELERATORS 1999'S HOT HARDWARE

The Colin McRae cover. But no mention of Colin McRae inside. Spook!
Reviews: Heretic 2: 91%, AFL 99: 90%, Israeli Airforce: 90%

MAR/APR PCPP #35

PC PowerPlay

STARCRAFT BROOD WAR

TWIN CD SPECIAL 23 GAMES 1.2 GIGs

John Romero desperately tries to keep Daikatana alive after being butchered by the press. He fails
Reviews: Heroes of Might and Magic III: 94% Simcity 3000: 90% Starsiege: Tribes: 88%
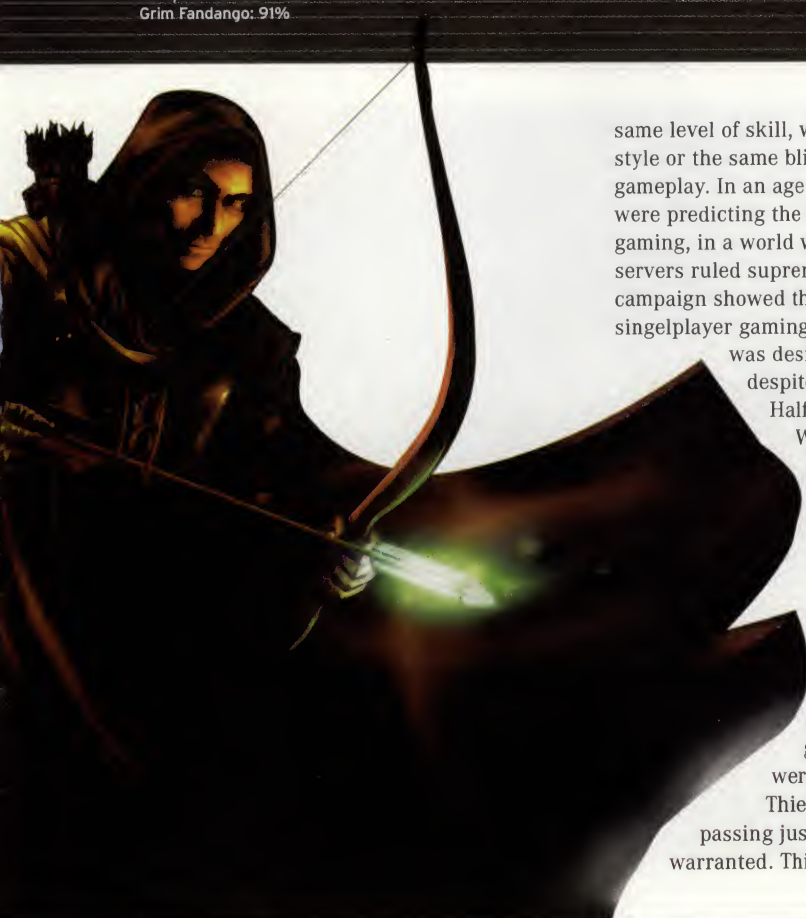
same level of skill, with the same sense of style or the same blistering quality of gameplay. In an age where industry pundits were predicting the death of singleplayer gaming, in a world where Quakeworld servers ruled supreme, the Half-Life campaign showed that vivid, engaging singelplayer gaming wasn't just possible, it was desirable. And yet, and YET despite all this, we didn't put Half-Life on the cover. Why? Who can say. It was just one of those things. We showed the S in FPS didn't necessarily have to refer to shootin'. It could also refer to stealth, sneaking, snooping and - most importantly - shadows. David Wildgoose even wrote an essay on Thief for his university degree, and received many accolades. Unfortunately, Thief remains the most misspelled game in reader correspondence, and now most of the PCPP staff refer to the game as The If.

1998 was also the year in which we began to think maybe there might be a slight possibility that just perhaps Prey might not

GRAND PRIX LEGENDS STEPPED BACK IN TIME TO WHEN CARS WERE CIGAR TUBES ON FOUR BIKE WHEELS, HURTLING AROUND GRAVEL TRACKS

felt European Air War was going to be a bigger game than Half-Life. We were tragically wrong. Thief was mentioned only in passing just then, so a closer look is warranted. This was a game that ever get released. This didn't worry us overmuch; we were plenty excited by the upcoming Duke Nukem Forever and Max Payne. This year also saw - or rather didn't see - Deus Ex announced behind closed doors at E3. Ben was waiting for Tiberian Sun, though. He had plans for that game.

1999 WITH OUR BACKS TO THE FUTURE...

The team knuckled down. 1999 was a big year. Despite whacko claims to the contrary, 1999 marked the end of a gaming millennium. In a scant thousand years, gaming had come all the way from bits of chiselled bone to the jaw-dropping splendour of HALO. Sure, HALO wasn't actually released in 99, but at this point we still thought it would be with us by Christmas.

Instead, what we got was another game versus game debate, this time between Quake 3 Arena and Unreal Tournament. On the one hand, a blazingly fast engine with lean mean deathmatch action, and on the other hand a considered selection of teamplay options and a variety of original weapons. In PowerPlay's Top 100 List, the positioning of Q3A above UT spawned more hate mail than anything since Tony the Reviewing Monkey.

Flightsim fans, long regarded as anorak-wearing oddbods cloistered away in cold garages with only a Thrustmaster yoke for company, leapt with joy at the release of Falcon 4.0. Although bugged to buggery, unstable and supporting a maximum resolution of just 800x600, hordes of fans and mod authors kept the sim alive, and in its own quiet way it prospered.

Dark Reign 2 was destined to be a bit of a disappointment, but Aussie development credibility was kept alive by Ratbag's release of Powerslide. Boasting the fastest 3D engine in the world, this post-apocalyptic arcade racer became truly the Don Bradman of...

AND WITH THAT, POWERPLAY HAD LOST ITS FOUNDING EDITOR. IT'S A SENSITIVE AND DIFFICULT TIME IN ANY MAGAZINE'S LIFE

post-apocalyptic arcade racers. And it was Australian. In the coming months and years, Ratbag would release Dirt Track Racing and DTR: Sprint Cars, which surprisingly showed racing round and round an oval track could in fact be quite entertaining.

1999

MAY PCPP #36 — We get our very first look at Black & White in this issue... we're impressed *Reviews:* Alpha Centauri: 96% Silver: 84% Rollercoaster Tycoon: 93%

JUNE PCPP #37 — The Wing Commander movie is released. The world weeps *Reviews:* Civilization: Call To Power 96% Aliens vs Predator: 96% Starsiege: 90%

JULY PCPP #38 — AMD K7 chipset and the 1Ghz processor introduced *Reviews:* Requiem: Avenging Angel: 90% Machines: 90% Rollcage: 90%

AUGUST PCPP #39 — Unreal Tournament. The Game. Our mag. This issue. *Reviews:* Unreal Tournament: 94% Star Wars: Racer: 90% Mechwarrior 3: 91%

SEPTEMBER PCPP #40 — We get first looks at three great games: Planescape, Giants, and System Shock 2. *Reviews:* Total Annihilation- Kingdoms: 84% Heavy Gear II: 93% Midtown Madness: 93%

OCTOBER PCPP #41 — Tiberian Sun and Deus Ex. We had cause for being exceptionally excited about ONE of these games... *Reviews:* Tiberian Sun: 94% Homeworld: 95% Kingpin: 86%
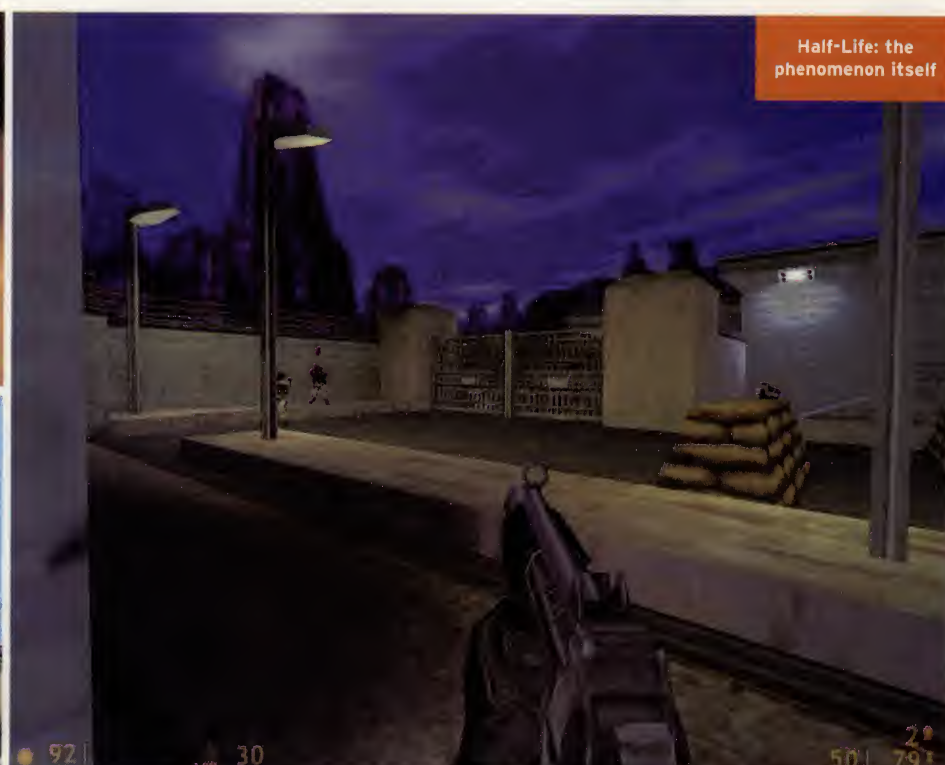
Half-Life: the phenomenon itself

Sorry, but we can't even remember what this is

DETONATOR	
NA	

Big Mac
Wind: W, 3kph

WP4. CP CHARLIE
HEADING: NA
GRID: NA
RANGE: 69m
ELEVATION: 22m

NOVEMBER PCPP #42

id announces an interest in revitalizing Wolfenstein 3D with the Quake 3 engine.
Reviews: System Shock 2: 98% Darkstone: 68% Jagged Alliance: 89%

DECEMBER PCPP #43

A preview of Warcraft III is unveiled at ECTS... and it still hasn't hit Beta.
Reviews: Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation: 89% Driver: 71% Drakan: 84%

2000

JANUARY PCPP #44

First 'Top 50 Games of All Time' feature come to light. Half of you still haven't forgiven us for our choices
Reviews: Omikron: Nomad Soul: 93% Rainbox Six: Rogue Spear 92%

FEBRUARY PCPP #45

QIII Arena and the much beloved Ben Mansill's last issue of Poweplay. A classic.
Reviews: Quake 3: 93% Ultima IX: Ascension: 70% Half Life: Opposing Force: 90%

MARCH PCPP #46

The first Team Fortress 2 delay is announced... the first of many.
Reviews: Imperium Galactica 2: 92% SWAT 3: 90% Planescape Torment: 91%

APRIL PCPP #47

PCPP gets it's first new editor- the short lived Dan Ziffer.
Reviews: The Sims: 90% Final Fantasy VIII: 77% Slave Zero: 84%

Then, all of a sudden, Ben Mansill announced that his time had come. He would move on. Upward, outward. And with that, PowerPlay had lost its founding editor. It's a sensitive and difficult time in any magazine's life. A time for the mag to take stock, to emerge from the bunker and taste the air, to have a good look around, and then go back into a dark room and get a serious grip on itself.

And then there was the Tiberian Sun review. If Ben's departure marked the beginning of the apocalypse, then our Tiberian Sun review saw Satan unleashed from Hell into the PowerPlay offices in sunny Surrey Hills. We gave that game 94%. It wasn't worth 94%. What can we say? A lack of decent RTS games coupled with a tendency to think Westwood could do no wrong (apart from Sole Survivor) and a little bit of foolishness on our part meant we were flooded with hate mail, even from retailers. It's not that Tiberian Sun is a bad game... it's just not worth anywhere near 94%. PowerPlay is never wrong, ever. Except this time.

Other critics of the magazine may have noted that PCPP#38 had the first of the now famous 'white covers' where a single game image was replaced by numerous informative 'hits' in the manner of a good newspaper or weekly journal. And speaking of covers, extensive polling in the PowerPlay office and throughout Next Media in general reveals a consensus that both our Unreal covers - Unreal and Unreal Tournament - were the worst covers ever. Malcolm Campbell blamed Epic, Epic blamed the Democrats, Bill Clinton blamed Saddam Hussein, our editor blamed deadlines and our readers never remarked one way or the other. And that was that for the twentieth century.

In many ways, the Millennium dawned dim for PC PowerPlay. We were still bringing Australia a top notch games mag, packed to the gutters with exclusive reviews, insightful previews and screenshots of HALO and Duke Nukem Forever (we'd long since given up on Max Payne) but there was something missing.

First off though, we had to deal with the backlash from our Star Wars: Force Commander review. Lucasarts had sunk a lot of development cash into this title, it was going to redefine realtime strategy, it was going to make up for the inchoate mess of Rebellion, and it was going usher in a new age of Star Wars gaming. Unfortunately it wasn't very good. Unfortunately, we said so. Unfortunately,

Lucasarts felt the need to have a lot of long and earnest lunches with PowerPlay's top dogs, until repeated demonstrations of the game - the terrible camera, the sub-standard graphics, the complete absence of that thing we like to call 'fun' - convinced even them it should be rushed to the budget bin and then quickly forgotten. Another victory for good journalism, unafraid to tell it like it was.

After Force Commander, we unexpectedly discovered a boxed copy of Daikatana sitting in the mailbox. Unexpected because like Max and Duke, we had also given up on John Romero's baby. With trembling hands, George Soropos tore off the polyurethane packaging, broke into the box, and installed the game. He desperately wanted it to be bad. He desperately wanted to

be able to ring up John Romero, scream "Suck it down!" and then hang up really quickly.

In fact, Daikatana was better than bad. It was average. Desperately, unremarkably average. It was such a nothing game that Romero couldn't even be martyred by gamers who didn't understand his unique vision. Daikatana was just blah.

Planescape: Torment, on the other hand, was anything but blah. It changed the nature of David Wildgoose. It showed that gaming could be sophisticated, literary, philosophical and dramatic. Torment also inspired the only Tony the Reviewing Monkey strip that was universal lauded by readers as being actually funny.

And of course, then there was Deus Ex. There is a large contingent of PCPP readers

2000

MAY PCPP #48

Microsoft's Gamestock showcased an enormous amount of quality this time round, including the ever formidable X-Box
Reviews: Messiah: 89%
Battlezone 2: 85% Nox: 83%

JUNE PCPP #49

Star Wars Galaxies is announced under the banner of Star Wars Online.
Reviews: Thief II: The Metal Age: 95% Star Wars: Force Commander: 58% Majesty: 79%

JULY PCPP #50
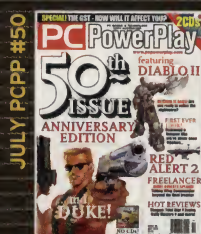
Our 50th issue... what else is there to say?
Reviews: Shogun: Total War: 92% Rally Masters: 89% Asheron's Call: 88%

AUGUST PCPP #51

Deus Ex and a new editor named Wildgoose in one issue? You have this issue framed on your wall right?
Reviews: Deux Ex: 98 Dark Reign 2: 89 Motocross Madness 2: 85%

SEPTEMBER PCPP #52

Looking Glass Studios shuts its doors and the gaming world laments the passing of a titan.
Reviews: Sydney 2000: 85% Ground Control: 90% Vampire: Masquerade: 82%

OCTOBER PCPP #53

This issue heralded the first step in the long PCPP Overhaul process...
Reviews: Baldur's Gate II: 93% Earth 2150: 91% Grand Prix 3: 88%

who really don't ever want to hear about Deus Ex ever again, but speaking with due love and respect, get stuffed. For David Wildgoose and Anthony Fordham, Deus Ex marked gaming's coming of age. It was big. It was beautiful. It was a shooter, and an RPG, and an adventure, a multitude of genres expertly blended to create a game that was - and remains - very near perfect. It's just a pity it only looks its best using a blasted Voodoo5.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT SHOWED GAMING COULD BE SOPHISTICATED, LITERARY, PHILOSOPHICAL

As the first year of the new millennium drew to a close, PowerPlay was looking for a new editor. The Company wanted someone who could take the mag to new places, to rebuild the mag as a mature and sophisticated title. They needed someone mature and sophisticated. Said publisher Jim Flynn, "We need a David Wildgoose kind of person." It took the Surry Hill's receptionist to suggest that David Wildgoose would indeed be just the

Deus Ex: the greatest game ever made, obviously

David Wildgoose kind of person they were looking for. And so the new age began.

Microsoft tried to derail us by announcing the XBOX, the all-singing all-dancing DirectX powered console that would stomp the PC as a games platform once and for all. For a while it even seemed like all was lost, with titles like HALO rescheduled for an exclusive XBOX first

release. Fortunately though, the XBOX is yet to appear, and a healthy stable of new games are still being bred as we wait.

The Sims, for instance, became Australia's best selling title, proving once and for that we as a nation like nothing more than being cruel to little people. And Black and White looms. A new kind of game for a new kind of world.

2001 A GAMES ODDYSEE

And so we look to the future. With David at the helm, Hugh in engineering, Chantal tending the sails and Anthony running around below decks, furiously thrashing such great oarsmen as Daniel and Christian, the good ship PC PowerPlay sails into a glorious dawn. Or something.

ANTHONY RUNNING AROUND BELOW DECKS, FURIOUSLY THRASHING SUCH GREAT OARSMEN AS DANIEL AND CHRISTIAN

2001 has begun very well indeed. For a start, no one can successfully argue we aren't in a new millennium. And we already seen such excellent titles as Red Alert 2, a nice dose of nostalgia for the good old days, and also Giants, a much-misunderstood title that every second reviewer condemned as boring and uninspired, but every other reviewer lauded as exciting and innovative.

And this year were are expecting some very important games indeed. Black and White for a start. Tribes 2 will be released, responding at last to a national outcry for escape from a swarm of Counter Strike newbies.

PC PowerPlay looks to the future. With five years under our belt, we're ready to forge ahead, ready to make more history. Because the history of PC PowerPlay is the history of games. Read on…

NOVEMBER PCPP #54
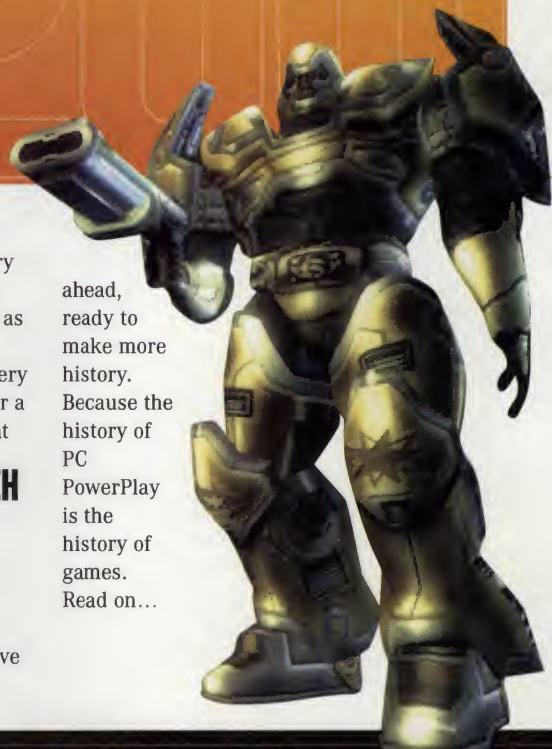
Thief 3 and Deus Ex 2 are simultaneously announced. *Reviews:* Midtown Madness: 82% Heavy Metal: FAKK2: 80% Age Of Empires II: 90%

DECEMBER PCPP #55

We preview Return to Castle Wolfenstein and, well, it was fantastic... *Reviews:* Escape From Monkey Island: 90% Sacrifice: 90% Crimson Skies: 89%

2001

JANUARY PCPP #56

Planetside, the massively multiplayer tactical FPS, is revealed as a tangible reality. *Reviews:* Hitman- Codename 47: 90% Rune: 80% No One Lives Forever: 90%

FEBRUARY PCPP #57

In a bad month for space games for the PC, Obi Wan is axed and Freelancer's future remained uncertain. *Reviews:* Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance: 91% Colin McRae Rally 2: 85%

MARCH PCPP #58

There's only one thing that can be said for this issue: Rest In Peace 3Dfx. *Reviews:* Quake 3: Team Arena: 57% Giants: Citizen Kabuto: 86% Oni: 88%

MARCH PCPP #59
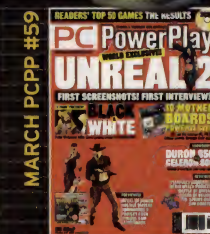
Our 'world exclusive' (bastards) look at Unreal 2. And some blokes called Pete *Reviews:* Officially the worst month for games ever

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Black & White: struggled to live up to its huge hype

PS2
PSX
PC
DREAMCAST
NINTENDO 64
XBOX
GAMECUBE
GAME BOY

YOUR GUIDE TO
2001 AND BEYOND!

HYPER»

ALL THE GAMES - ALL THE SYSTEMS

IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

GAMES

Now this is more like it. In order to make up for the embarrassing lack of decent games last month, we've gone overboard this time. Since the Black & White review starts on the very next page I'll avoid going on and on about how this game doesn't quite live up to the hype, but still manages to be the best little-person sim ever, and let you read the review for yourself.

Meanwhile, after many false starts, Tribes 2 is here. We've had to have the PCPP carpet professionally cleaned after spending two full days - that's 48 consecutive hours folks, without food or water - blasting, literally, the snot out of each other on the office LAN. Forget Team Arena, this is the future of multiplayer.

Also the first of an incipient deluge of World War II RTS games has arrived, and George thinks its simply top ho. Or if pounding Gerry doesn't blitz your krieg, there's always Clive Barker's Undying, a very decent monster-bash featuring Irish accents, a giant killer Cicada in the last level, and a gay butler.

And then, holding a special place in my heart, is Serious Sam. At last. In all his chaingun fury. With his unsettling buddies Hilarious Harry and Piratical Pete.

So next month expect a return to the vitriolic, opinionated Editorials you expect from PCPP, but for now you'll have to excuse us. We've got games to play.

anthonyf@next.com.au

THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

BLACK & WHITE

In which we are at last able to answer,
'What can change the nature of a giant cow?'

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Lionhead

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR
Electronic Arts

PRICE
$89.95

RATING
M

NEED
Win9x
Celeron 400
64Mb RAM
500Mb HDD
16Mb TNT2
Direct3D
SB compatible
Wheel mouse

WANT
Win98 SE
Athlon 1GHz
128Mb RAM
500Mb HDD
GeForce2 MX
Direct3D
Gametheater XP
Patience

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

AVAILABLE
Now

ONLINE

www.ai.sri.com
SRI International's
centre for Artificial
Intelligence. A
genuinely useful
site, packed with AI
info. As I said to my
editor, "What are
you doing Dave?"

Kiwi hell? Nah, probably get in trouble if we say that

Temple 86% built requires 2453 wood...

Worship me fools!

FILTHY HABITS

Left to his own devices – often
necessary in the early part of the
game - the creature develops routines
and habits he enjoys. My tiger, named
Rasputin's Aunt for reasons which
are unlikely to become clear at the
moment, likes to fish. He will spend
all day standing ankle-deep in water looking at fish and
occasionally scooping some up. His only problem at the
moment is that he tends to, shall we say, go potty in the
water, which scares the fish away. Whereupon he will go and
eat a villager. The little bastard.

Right well there's a lot to cover
here so make sure you're sitting
comfortably and we will get on with it.
Be warned though, you're probably not
going to like this review. Because Black
& White is not the Holy Grail of Gaming,
it's not the next big thing, it's pretty
much just Populous Plus. But it's still
very good.

Like Diablo II, Black & White doesn't have
a save/load system in a conventional sense.
When the game is started for the first time, it
prompts the player for a username and then
begins the story.

Are you experienced?

The experience of Black & White begins in a
sandy corridor of palms approaching a
beach. A rather typical voice-over mutters
some guff about an innocent world not
needing a God, while a young family strolls
toward the surf. Caught up in their sickening
love for each other, the parents momentarily
lose track of their child, who runs to play in
the rising tide. When they realise he's headed
for the water, they start to cry out and run
after him. Cut to a couple of rather
mechanical-looking sharks closing in on the
hapless toddler. Distraught, the parents fall
to their knees and begin to pray.

And so a new god is born. After a brief
rendered scene involving a glowing ball of
fire racing through a sort of hyperspace, the
camera returns to the floundering child and
an enormous ectoplasmic hand appears and
snatches him from the waves. The hand is
you. Black & White has started.

Much to the dismay of David Wildgoose
(see his plans in PCPP#59) the player has no
control over whether or not to save the child.
It's the first compulsive act of a new god,
and as soon as the parents have finished
praising their new deity, two cartoony

Black & White involves thinking up clever ways to impress tiny people

consciences appear, one good and one evil.
And yes, they are an angel and a devil. You
will grow to hate these consciences. Every
time an opportunity to discover some great
new thing about the game appears, one of
these guys pops up and explains it - at
length - thus removing any of the joy of
discovery or personal growth you might
otherwise have experienced.

And speaking of experience, the first
hands-on experience of the game involves
a tutorial in how to move the camera, a
tutorial which cannot be skipped. Left click
and drag to move the hand - the only
visible sign of the player - to different
locations. In order to rotate and tilt the
camera, it is necessary to move the mouse
to certain positions on the side and top of
the screen, then hold down the left mouse
button to make the movements. Tilting and
rotating can also be done by clicking the
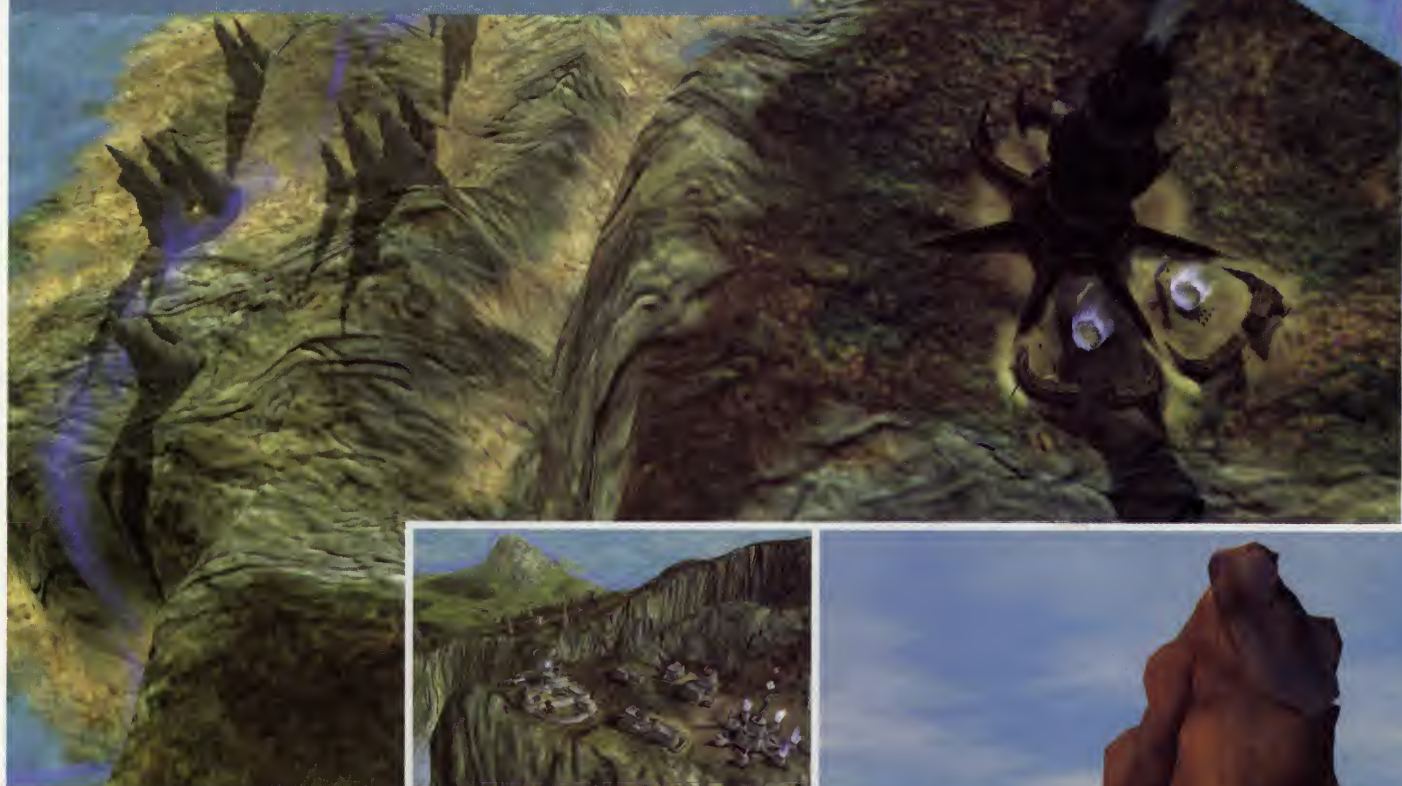
It's vertigo-tastic!

Downtown Lethysville

Nemesis! My old master has returned!
Creature. Speak no more.
I must tell you the secret of the Creed. It's the source of godly power

Humphrey gives himself an uppercut

third button of the mouse. Zooming is handled by holding down both buttons and moving the mouse back and forward, or using the mouse wheel. Confused?

If there is a criticism of Black & White that must be aired as soon as possible, it's in the control method. This system of camera movement takes a lot of getting used to. This left-click-and-drag methodology tends to make moving around the landscape quite a lurching and often disorienting affair.

What the hell am I doing here?

Black & White is about being a god, and about gaining power and dominance over other gods. In any B&W environment, there are several villages which believe in either the player, the opposing gods, or are spiritually neutral. Using belief, gods must take control of these villages to expand their area of spiritual influence, which in turn gives them more power. Eventually, a god will be able to cast destructive miracles directly on an enemy's temple, and once the temple is destroyed, the associated god is banished from the realm.

To make a village believe in a god, that god must cast miracles or perform more

mundane spiritual acts in order to impress the villagers. Moving a boulder through mid air will be seen as slightly impressive, while setting fire to the storehouse with a fireball is seen as very impressive indeed. Because people are adaptive, the same divine act rarely impresses twice, and certainly never three times. This means that the quest for expansion and new territory in Black & White mostly involves thinking up cleverer ways in which to impress tiny people.

Adding spice to the mix is the creature. Born into the world ignorant of his potential and only five or six times bigger than a villager, the creature must be taught all the things in life that will make him useful as a god's familiar. The sorts of

things that are appropriate to eat. When and where it is appropriate to empty his bowels. Whether or not eating faeces is necessarily a terribly social thing to do. How to make himself useful, by gathering food, building houses, or even casting miracles of his own.

The creature learns by watching, and as his god moves through the world, the creature will attentively mimic the god's behaviour. A god who casts hundreds of destructive miracles and tosses villagers into the sea just for the hell of it will breed a creature similarly inclined. Over time, over a great deal of time, the creature will grow in both stature and power until he towers over all other living things in the world and has at his command a full spectrum of miracles and spells. Essentially, when fully developed, the creature takes a lot of the workload off the player.
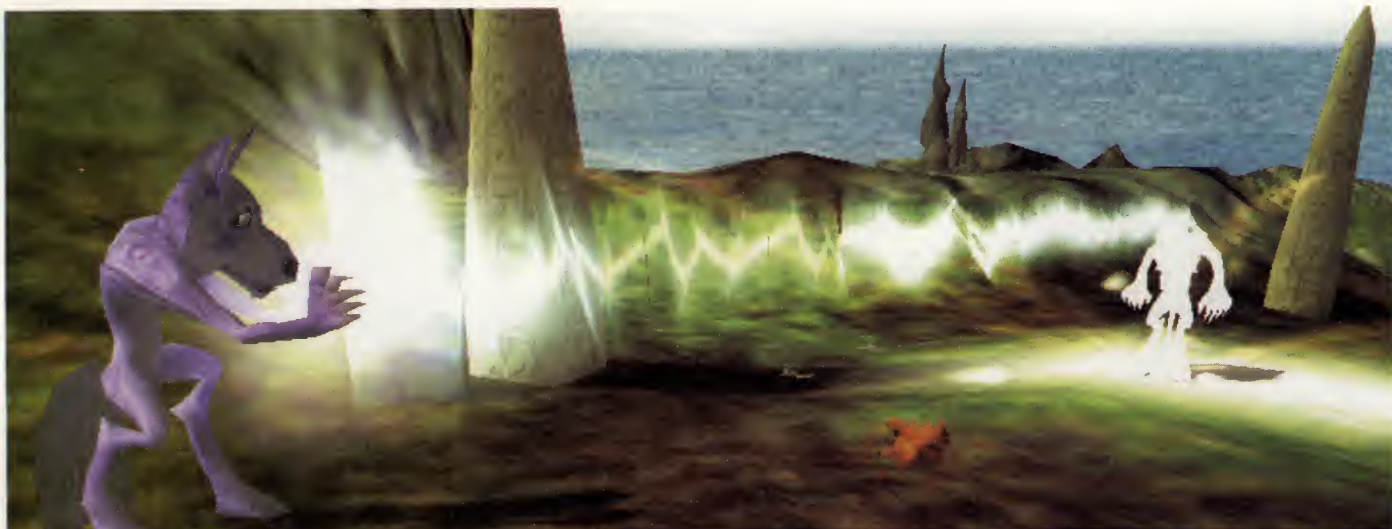
Rasputin's Aunt cops a wolfin'

Filthy gesture? No, this is my old finger-snapping trick!

I gave them timber, is it too much to ask that they build their own house?

Unfortunately though, to fully develop a creature actually doubles or even triples the workload in the early game. While building villages - in itself a time-consuming and detailed task mostly involving the distribution of wood - it is necessary to keep a close eye on the creature and continually show him things, to stop him just wandering off and fishing for hours on end.

FEEL THE WRATH OF GODS!

The story of Black & White revolves around the machinations of an older god named - in a bold strike of originality - Nemesis. Apparently there is a thing called the Creed, which gives a god enormous power. Nemesis has one of these Creeds, and your consciences quickly decide you should grab another. Everyone who tries to help you - including an old creature cast aside by Nemesis, and another god named Kahzar - ends up getting the big zap from the man upstairs. Nemesis' ally Lethys then takes the rather drastic step of kidnapping your creature, and after that well, there's nothing for it. You'll just have to open up a can of that crazy old VENGEANCE!

Moral turpitude

Of course, as hyped over and over again, the really interesting part of Black & White is player alignment. The game keeps careful tabs on every act carried out by a young god, and adjusts the god's alignment accordingly. Alignment is expressed by a rather abstract statistic which runs to two decimal places. A negative alignment suggests the player is good while a positive alignment suggests they are evil.

Players wishing to roleplay Satan will be frustrated to learn that Black & White is heavily biased toward doing good. At its most basic level, this is because giving wood to villagers (necessary to even stay in the game) and building them houses and gathering food are all seen as good acts, and affect player alignment accordingly.

In terms of the narrative, this bias appears when silver scrolls appear over various points on the map - usually a dwelling - and a little person comes out and asks the player to perform some task, from collecting sacred stones to saving downing husbands. However, all the tasks ask the player to do something good, whereupon the irritating good conscience appears and explains to the player how to accomplish the task, while the evil conscience suggests a fairly obvious alternative. Little people never ask the player to do something evil, such as kill a neighbour. Being evil is a conscious and often anti-productive decision while being good means simply going about your daily business.

However, the opportunity to actively do extra good is limited by the fact that the little people never get into trouble by themselves. The weather is always sunny or briefly rainy or snowy, there are no predators except the player's creature if he has been trained to eat little people, and whenever people get sick it is because the player has found the 'cure this village of its plague' sub-quest. The little people really don't seem to need you very much.

That is, until you start to interact with them, whereupon you realise these people are so stupid they can't even breed with each other unless they have been explicitly thrust together by a giant hand from heaven. They can't build their own houses, although they can collect their own food and wood.

Molyneux said the player could do anything that was physically sensible in the B&W world, that there were no limits. Unfortunately "anything" in this case means picking trees,
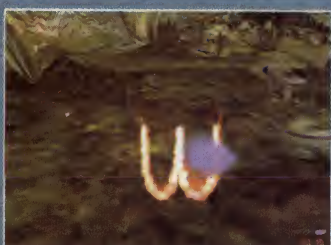
A big deal was made of gesture recognition, and here it is in action. Rather than clicking an icon on the screen, hold down the right mouse button and draw a series of shapes on the ground. This will activate the spell. Of course, there are an awful lot of shapes to remember, so Lionhead kindly displays them as little icons in the corner of the screen. So, rather than have a screenful of icons you can click on, B&W has a screenful of icons you can't click on. Now that's innovation.

Sunday morning, everyone's at church

I am Woman hear me roar!

I swear it was this big!

throwing stones and tickling villagers. There is a limited amount of stuff that is interactive. For instance, some boulders can be picked up, but others cannot. Village torch poles cannot be moved, and firepits or campfires can't be used to set fire to things. Neither can these fires be kicked apart. Water cannot be scooped up, the land cannot be deformed and buildings can only be destroyed by fire or by dropping rocks on them.

Extra interactivity is introduced through the use of miracles, or spells. A god can cast a variety of spells, from conjuring wood and food out of thin air, to launching fireballs across the landscape and summoning rather pissweak storms.

Dynamic!

Miracles need power, and power is generated by worshippers. Commanding people to worship at the god's temple creates prayer energy, which charges miracles. Unfortunately, the little people are so dumb they will worship their way into an early grave, and it is often necessary to disband the worshippers so they go and eat. Managing prayer energy is one of the never-ending tasks of Black & White.

Black & White is different to other games. For instance, it's not possible for the player to directly attack their opponent. The closest they come is when two creatures have a duel, which takes place in an arena and all other game action stops while the duel is taking place. This duel is basically a limited beat-em-up, where attacks are cued on the enemy by clicking his creature, and defensive moves are made by clicking on your own creature.

Otherwise, in order to combat an opponent, miracles must be cast on his villages. It's always the innocent who suffer, and it can be quite exciting to watch an invisible foe painting spells onto the landscape. Careful observation of spell shapes (see Gesture Recognition) even allows the player to pre-empt spells and counter with appropriate defences.

Multiplayer B&W is at once something new and something familiar. We were unable to play in the persistent online world, since it hadn't been activated at the time of writing, but we did play a few skirmish games, which are lots of fun. Each god can have up to four people controlling an individual hand, so co-operative play is catered for admirably. The inability to directly attack an opponent creates a

camaraderie of foes, with players blaming their creature or the little people when things go awry, while opposing players offer sympathy.

However, skirmish games are map-based, with dominance of territory and destruction of temples determining the winner. And the little people in skirmish seem even stupider than in the main game, and the lack of side quests makes the game seem quite abstract and mechanical.

Wrapping it up

This review is like an English teacher I once had. He would hand back essays covered in red scrawl, with comments like "inconsistent argument" and "check your facts" and "poor structure" only to write on the last page "good, 18/20". Sure, I've beaten the crap out of Black & White. But that's because I'm trying to be evil. And the blasted game makes it so difficult!

Black & White disappoints on many levels. It's not as organic as we had hoped. The creature is not as integral to the game as we had hoped. The world isn't as interactive as we had hoped. And the control method is irritating. So what does all this mean? It means you should go out and buy it *now*.

Anthony Fordham

TRIBES 2

When two tribes go to war, the greatest FPS ever is born

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Dynamix

PUBLISHER
Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR
Havas

PRICE
$89.95

RATING
MA15+

NEED
Win9x
PII-350
4Mb RAM
450Mb HDD
16Mb 3D videocard
Direct3D
SB Compatible
56K internet

WANT
Win98 SE
Athlon 800
128Mb RAM
750Mb HDD
32Mb GeForce2
Direct 3D
Gametheater XP
Cable internet

MULTIPLAYER
Only multiplayer

AVAILABLE
May 2001

ONLINE

www.tribalwar.com
A fan site for Tribes and Tribes 2 of the very highest quality.

www.snaggs.com
An Australian and NZ Tribes 2 fan site worth a visit.

Match starts in 4 seconds.
Match starts in 3 seconds.
Match starts in 2 seconds.
Match starts in 1 second.

98... 99... 100... coming ready or not!

Never surprise a man urinating

Let's rock!

Come back you cowards!

The buzz has been building for quite some time now for the inevitable sequel to the cult-hit Tribes. Dynamix have put a heap of work into the problem areas of the original with Tribes2 and the results are excellent. There is still a significant learning curve to the game, and it's definitely more complex than any other FPS title present or past. However, the single player structure of the game gradually weans you on to the more advanced tactics (*Weans you on? – Ed*), explaining what's required and how to do it through an increasingly difficult series of missions against bots.

Beginning with a simple 'run to the enemy base, kill the bots, capture the flag' mission, new players are introduced to all the basic aspects through both a voiceover and a visual display. To make it even more newbie friendly, there are three levels of AI proficiency for each mission, and on the lowest setting the bots really are little more than occasionally animate targets - just perfect for the novice to get the hang of the game.

Another drawback to the original Tribes was the insularity of the community that grew around the game. Tribes 2 comes with a fully equipped and very well implemented community system as a part of the game itself. Magic! For starters, each time you start T2 you go through the WON authentication server and automatically download any patches that have been released, making the process nice and easy. Once started, a series of options is presented to you - a news section for all the latest from the development team, forums (with a huge range of topic areas), an in-game email system, IRC-style chat and even a community browser to view other

This toilet has no door!

Must... not... make... penis... joke...

I'm being flanked by icons!

players and clans details, search for a clan with a position vacant, add users to your buddy lists and so on.

This might all sound just like frilly bits, but it really adds a great and warm feel to the game, makes it all much friendlier and simpler. The interfaces for the aforementioned utilities are simple, clean and effective - navigating around for complete newbies is easy, and reading through forums of more experienced players is the perfect way to gather invaluable advice. Excellent!

No time for sight-seeing

And so we (finally) move to the game itself. As per usual with multiplayer games nowadays, Tribes 2 comes with an in-game server list, so to find the nearest server (and there is an Australian Master server too, by the way) is a relatively simple matter. All of the usual details are included, type of game, ping time, players, and so on. Again, simple, functional, intuitive - perfect!

Once in the game it's time to get busy - no time to stop and look at the scenery now! Although, if it weren't for all those annoying opposition players blasting the crap out of you, it would be nice to just wander around and admire how pretty everything is - if you've got a powerful enough system that is. At high resolutions, and with the graphics options set

Tribes2 comes with an in-game server list, and there's an Australian Master Server too

up high T2 really is a visual masterpiece. The detail in the ground and sky is just lovely, water and lava and such look great, there's plenty of detail in buildings and structures and the player models are polygon-rich and move (fairly) realistically. Of course, unless you're lucky enough to have a mega rig, you're going to need to turn detail levels down for a decent frame rate, particularly for online play.

In terms of actual gameplay, there's really not that much to fault at all. Tribes

veterans will be pleased to know that nothing has changed all that radically - apart from fixing a few problem areas

that needed fixing. In the original Tribes, an undocumented feature (much like strafe jumping in Quake-engined games) allowed players, particularly heavily armoured players (heavies), to ski down hills by holding down the jump key. On large hills, players could gain a hell of a lot of momentum and almost be untouchable as they were moving so fast. With T2, skiing has been left in

You joined the Inferno team
Match starts in 15 seconds.
Match starts in 10 seconds.
Match starts in 5 seconds.

04.41

Excuse me, is this the men's?

Oops... slippery

Darth Vader's toilet

This looks like a good spot for a whizz...

as a now-documented feature but has been altered significantly so that factors like air resistance hold a player back from gaining too much speed. Skiing has now become a skill that requires practice to master, but isn't by itself a critical advantage, and kudos to Dynamix for that balancing act. Where the game becomes complex is with the amount of options players have for attacking and defending, and the

amount of co-ordinated teamwork required for both (see the boxouts on vehicles and the command console for more). In your base are a few 'inventory pads' which allow you to customise the weapons and kits you carry - and the variety available is staggering.

There are three types of avatars; scout, soldier and heavy. Scouts are faster but carry less armour, and are the only model that has access to sniper rifles and cloaking packs. Soldiers are 'jack of all trades, master of none', and heavies are slow, heavily armoured deathbringers.

Fill 'er up

The beauty of the inventory pads are that you can chop and change them as often as you like between the different classes by going back to the pads and changing your loadout. Need to set up some defences?

Just hit the numpad enter key to bring up your loadout choices, select a soldier or heavy and select some spider clamp turrets (for indoor defences) or maybe some landspike turrets for outside placement, or maybe even plasma, ELF, missile or mortar turret emplacements to set up on the 'turret barrels' around your base, and then jump onto the inventory pads to get kitted out. Similarly, you can chop and change what weapons you carry, mines, grenades, and what type of pack to carry for whatever your aim (defence, attack, repair, etc). The pack slot is your special slot, and depending on what class you are you choose from cloaking packs, repair packs (both for players and turrets), extra energy, extra ammo, sensor jammers, and shields. Sound confusing? Don't worry, it's really all very simple and

COMMAND CIRCUIT

The CC is a simply brilliant idea, and in large-scale team games can really set Tribes 2 above anything else - with a capable commander, that is. All players can access the CC, but the idea for large-scale games is that one player finds a nice secluded hidey hole, brings up the CC and communicates with the other team members to help direct them where necessary, allocate tasks and generally run the field of battle. The CC is also a valuable tool for every player to stay aware of how the scenario is panning out. The left side of the CC contains an overhead of the map, showing assets like bases, turrets, and friendly and enemy players in radar range, just like any RTS. The right side of the screen contains 7 icons and 7 tabs for; teammates, tactical assets (base turrets, etc), deployed tactical (deployed turrets, etc), support assets (inventory pads, towers, generators, etc), deployed support (deployed inventory pads, etc), waypoints and objectives for that map. Clicking on the icons brings down the tabs for the icon, allowing the player to set a very specific command, say for a specific player to repair a certain tower, or to support an attacking unit, or to take out an enemy turret, or just to mark the location of an enemy running away with your flag, and a host more. It's essentially a way for a commander to sit back and run a team, and though it is quite complex to get your head around during the heat of battle an experienced commander can use it to really turn the tide of battle.

Maybe THIS is the men's

You are now observing: Slicer

Psssssst...

Nope, it wasn't the men's

You are now observing: Gray Sabot

Geez I need a slash

---

intuitive once you get the hang of it, and you can set your desired loadouts and bind them to a hotkey - there is probably only 5 or 6 basic loadouts that you will end up specialising in and making small adjustments on the fly is a snip.

There is no I in Team

Tribes 2 is a made from the ground up to be a team game for a large amount of players - servers can hold up to 64 players. In reality, this isn't going to happen all that often, but teams of around 15 apiece aren't all that uncommon, and keeping a team of that size organised is no mean feat. With innovations such as the Command Circuit (see boxout) it is made much easier for a commander to take control and direct, but Tribes 2 makes it outrageously easy to communicate with your teammates too.

For starters voice communication is built in to the system - no need for Roger Wilco or anything like that. Get a headset, click on the 'enable voice communication' option and that's it - beautiful. Voice does take up a respectable amount of bandwidth however, so modem users may encounter a few problems with this. If you don't have a headset or don't have the bandwidth, Dynamix has set up a simply awesome way to communicate.

To access the voice bind menus, you just hit 'V', which pops up a menu of options (attack, defend, self, vehicle, base, and so on) all bound to a different key, select again, and there's another set of sub-options to get down to the specifics of what you want to say (and possibly another sub-menu). Again, it does sound complicated but it really is amazingly easy - the keys are all

right next to your movement keys and within a few hours of playing time you'll be able to tell your teammates what you're doing without even looking (I will defend the flag = v-s-d-f, for example) in milliseconds. Simply magnificent!

Oh no - we have run out of space for this review. Bugger. To be completely honest we have only really scratched the surface of Tribes 2. There's so much depth, so many little bits and pieces that just make the game so much fun to play whether you are a newcomer or an old hand, so many different ways to play, so many different strategies and aspects of the game to master that it would take up the entire magazine to go through them all and communicate effectively to you just how bloody good it is.

Gareth Jones

SUDDEN STRIKE

Never in the history of RTS has World War II been so fun

ONLINE

www.tankmuseum.co.uk
See! A bunch of English nutters spending their waking lives restoring horrific machines of war!

The Government cracks down on protestors at the proposed Badgery's Creek airport site

Gerry rushes to bag the 'shrooms

Some party last night, huh?

Tanks for the memory, bwaha...

June 6, 1944. Normandy – D-Day. Did anyone give a thought to the fishies? What about the crabs? Was anyone concerned about the molluscs? The Allied beach landings were a veritable Marinara of seafood slaughter, so why no tomb to the unknown Crustacean? Why no Hall of Remembrance for the little fluffy bunnies squashed mercilessly under the treads of Wermacht armour? International conspiracy or just common sense? Or are we just desperate to find an introductory theme for this review?

Sudden Strike is the most wonderful kind of game, one that comes from nowhere and blows away the competition so fearsomely that it makes you wonder what other developers have been doing to be so uninteresting by comparison.

It's real time strategy but more along the lines of the Microsoft/SSI Close Combat series than any resource-based title like Red Alert 2. As you may have surmised by now the game takes place during the WWII era, or 1944 and beyond to be precise. Developers CDV have chosen to let you play as the Germans, Americans/British or the Soviets in a titanic struggle to win control of Europe through a series of missions that segue and progress historically through the different stages of the post D-Day conflict.

This is one big mutha of a game. It boasts nearly 50 missions, numerous useful structures and building types and supports up to 1000 units per scenario. 1000! Try getting 1000 units on screen in RA2 or Starcraft, and your PC would be running at about four frames per hour. Sudden Strike manages it without slowing down too much, even on a reasonably modest PC (Celeron 500MHz) And that's with some of the best AI routines yet seen in a strategy game running in the background. As our favourite Fast Show character says "Brilliant!"

Suddenly Addictive

The key to Sudden Strike's addictiveness though is the way in which it incorporates the sort of hardcore strategy elements usually only found in turn based titles like Talonsoft's Campaign Series into a real time engine without weighing the player down and slowing the flow of the game.

Reactions were mixed at Utzon's new Opera House design

Angry residents carpet bomb the Big Day Out

A veritable forest of 'shrooms

Generic WWII scene #3485

it incorporates hardcore strategy elements into a realtime engine without weighing the player down

There are an awesome number of different unit types in the game, everything from your average infantryman to flame thrower units, tank killers, snipers and Katyusha rocket launchers. Most tank types fielded by the respective armies involved also feature, as well as a full compliment of artillery and their transport vehicles.

Each unit type has unique strengths and weaknesses, attacks and defensive capabilities. Moving tanks through urban areas without infantry support for example is an invitation to disaster as enemy troops can take them out with mines, bazookas or anti-tank rifles.

Artillery comes in the form of direct fire pieces like anti-tank guns or indirect fire pieces like the Howitzers. Their crews can move some of the lighter guns, slowly, but it's better to use transports for long distances. One really neat trick is to infiltrate enemy artillery locations with snipers and infantry, take out the gun crews and then capture the pieces for yourself, turning them toward the enemy and giving 'em both barrels.

Any great strategy game will allow the player to create innovative strategies like this and Sudden Strike is well suited for creative leadership. The vast number of units and the interactive terrain make every problem an interesting challenge and one that is usually solvable in many different ways. Bridges can be blown and re-built, buildings fortified,

pillboxes captured, tank traps laid and mine fields cleared or set.

Great Interface

No game like this would play well without a great interface and Sudden Strike wins on that front as well. There a few minor problems such as number-assigned groups losing their number assignment when entering a building or manning a gun but these have mostly been fixed with the version 1.2 patch which you should grab immediately after installing the game. The only remaining problem comes from telling too many units to cross a bridge, which as usual results in half of them taking the very long way around, but it's not unbearable.

The best thing about the interface is its innovative and comprehensive use of waypoints. Sudden Strike doesn't just provide these as a way of moving units but you can also incorporate defensive and offensive actions into a stream of waypoints giving you unprecedented control over your troops.

Many strategy fans were beginning to despair over the lack of new titles on the horizon, but CDV has saved the day with Sudden Strike. We fought them on the beaches, we fought them in the streets, and we loved it!
George Soropos

PCPP

FOR
- Hardcore strategy
- Heaps of missions
- Mod-ready!

AGAINST
- No tutorial
- Overwhelming
- AI niggles

OVERALL
A refreshing break from sci-fi RTS, good wholesome WWII action. Top stuff!

92%

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

Psycho meets Family Ties in the green fields of fair Erin, to be sure
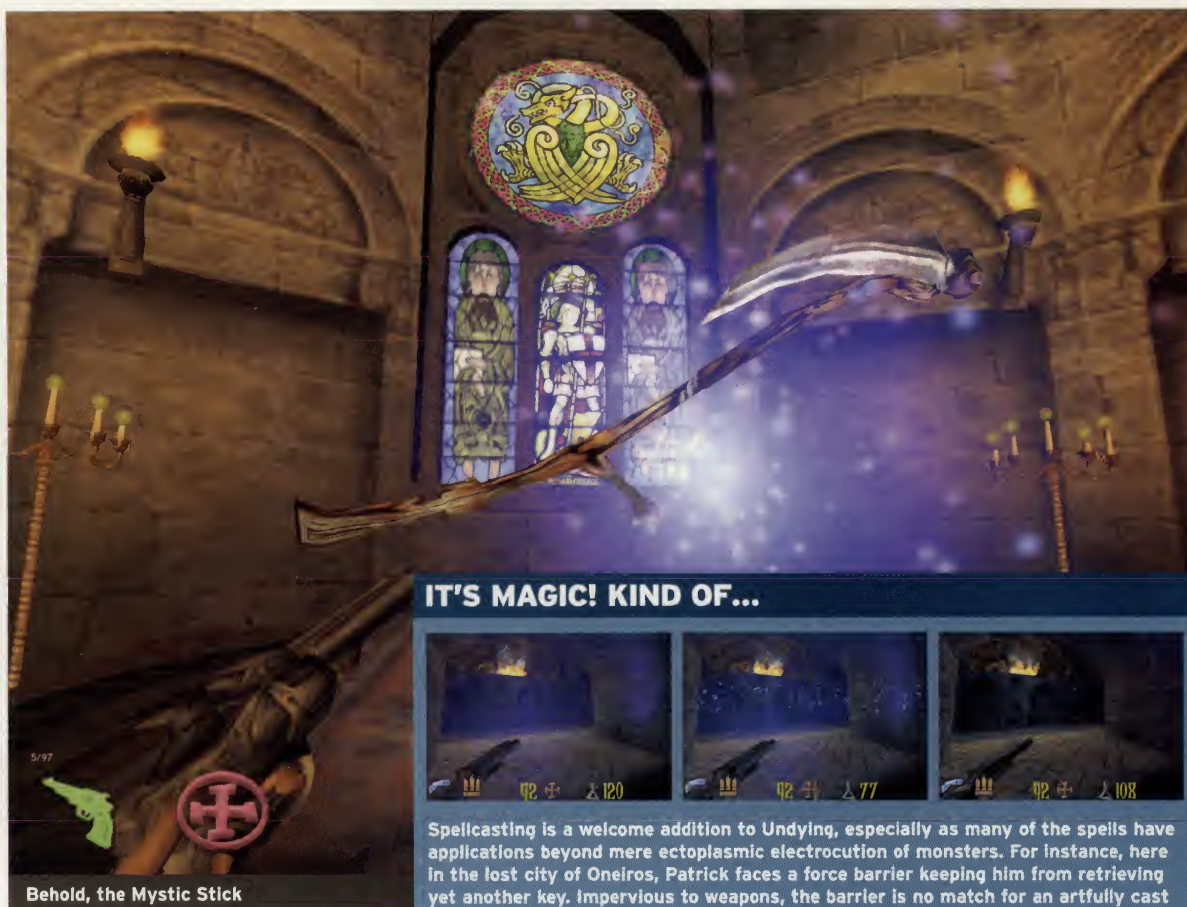
Behold, the Mystic Stick

IT'S MAGIC! KIND OF...

Spellcasting is a welcome addition to Undying, especially as many of the spells have applications beyond mere ectoplasmic electrocution of monsters. For instance, here in the lost city of Oneiros, Patrick faces a force barrier keeping him from retrieving yet another key. Impervious to weapons, the barrier is no match for an artfully cast Dispel Magic. The pixie dust flies, and Patrick is free to move on. Another notable spell puzzle involves charging a lightning rod with - oddly enough - a lightning spell, in order to raise a ladder. Any questions? We thought not.

C live Barker has made a big deal out of being personally and intimately involved in this horror-action game, but it's difficult to see exactly what unique difference he has made, except for the title. Undying is a highly competent, at times impressive, but often familiar monster-thrashing blast'n'zap festival, positioned thematically somewhere between Blood and Half Life.

Undying follows the exploits of Patrick Galloway, an Irish adventurer called to the aid of his wartime friend Jeremiah Covenant. Heir to an enormous rambling mansion on the Irish coast, Jeremiah is tormented by apparitions of his four dead siblings and a mysterious guest named Otto Keisinger.

Responding to Jeremiah's call, Patrick must explore the mansion and surrounding areas, to track down and exorcise the spirits of Jeremiah's two brothers and two

Patrick prepares to fling a bogey

sisters. As with Half Life, the player starts at point A - outside the front gate of the mansion - and runs to point Z, with few alternate routes or side areas to explore.

Howlin' good time

The most immediately innovative aspect of Undying lies in its combined weapon/ spellcasting system. Activated with the mouse buttons, weapons are fired from the left hand and spells cast from the right. A pool of mana recharges at a moderate rate after spells are used, and weapon ammunition is handled in the traditional manner.

The system is particularly effective when spells and weapons are combined, allowing for more potent attacks and offensive-defensive combos. Unfortunately the management system is very poor. With one set of scrolling keys for weapons, and another for spells, it can become very confusing when trying to use some combinations.

For instance, the Scrye spell works as a limited torch, and outlines enemies in a purple aura, making them easier to target. Ectoplasm fires a short-range bolt of energy, and can be used to stave off attackers while the six-shot revolver is reloading. However, casting Scrye in order to see enemies, while firing to prevent being wounded, while scrolling to Ectoplasm before six revolver shots have been fired, results in an inelegant scrabble across the keyboard, with much confusion and frequent casting of completely inappropriate spells.

Scrye, mentioned above, also allows Patrick to reveal spiritual events in certain areas. Casting Scrye on a painting reveals

Mother isn't feeling so well

Getting down with some serious Abbot action

the true nature of those depicted; a conservative family portrait, for instance, is transformed into an image of four slavering monsters hovering around Jeremiah's headless corpse. Also, many events key to furthering the plot are revealed with Scrye, whether these events be ghostly monks performing rituals in a ruined monastery, or conversations held between family members decades ago.

Lizbeth is a honey

The pace of the game fluctuates somewhat due to at times ineffective level design and communication of objectives to the player. While some areas proceed at a breakneck pace, with barely enough time afforded to admire the impressive scenery, others result in aimless searching for a door. The monastery is a particular offender, since completion of the level requires that Patrick access the roof, through a particularly obscure window tucked away in a corner of the cloisters.

Still, Undying often impresses. For example, after casting a time-travel spell on a pool outside the ruined monastery, Patrick can see the building reflected in the water as it appeared before it was destroyed. Unfortunately though, too much of the game revolves around the retrieval of keys for certain doors, a design element which seems to exist only for the sake of making levels appear less linear.

The story unfolds through the use of cut scenes, conversations and journal entries. While occasional confusion is caused by the player failing to enter rooms in the right order, the plot is on the whole compelling. Excellent facial detail on the models and excellent voice acting put some cut scenes in the Giants class of polygon acting.

What the hell is *that?*

Enemy AI is basic, utilising the sole tactic of move-close-to-player-and-attack. Fortunately the creatures move very quickly, or are conceived in such a way as to hide the

limited nature of the AI. Skeletons, while somewhat cliched, are the best ever seen, especially since it is possible to slice off limbs until Patrick is eventually facing only a savagely thrusting pelvis.

And Undying is definitely unnerving, especially when played alone late at night in an empty house. Use of audio enhances the classically creepy environments, and addition of such horror kitsch as gently blowing curtains, lightning, bloodstains and rising damp cement the atmosphere. Poltergeists in the kitchen are very effective, especially in generating apprehension when entering a room full of carving knives.

As a monster-blaster, Undying excels. If the game is viewed as a simplistic and whimsical romp through an old-school ghost story, then the hours required to complete the game will not seem wasted. From this perspective, the story is an added bonus and the character development aids in the suspension of disbelief. However, if viewed as a meatier adventure game or even a limited RPG, Undying fails due to awkward item management, basic plot implementation and a focus on key retrieval. Far from undying, it occasionally feels dead on its feet.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

FOR
- Great characters
- Stellar design
- Frightening

AGAINST
- Awkward spells
- Obscure objectives
- Key searching

OVERALL
Scary, particularly when "you need the gold key"

83%

NASCAR RACING 4

Left, left, left, mind the... oh consarnit!

I think we have to turn left up here...

Roadkill-cam

HAWAII FIVE-O

Back in the days of the original Nascar Racing, some budding Nascar fans in Hawaii decided to put together the ultimate online racing competition with competitors simply "dialling" into servers based in Hawaii. Now this sounds crude, but you've got to remember we're talking about the days before cable modems and even 56kbps! The competition was a huge success, and has itself evolved into a fully-fledged independent championship boasting big cash prizes and some of the best virtual Nascar talent the world has to offer!

PCPP

OVERALL
Ladies and gentlemen, we have a new champion!

93%

All that the Don meant to us, so did Dale Earnhardt represent to Americans. On the last lap of a recent event in which his son ironically finished first, Earnhardt's life was cut tragically short. The Legend of Nascar was killed instantly as his car ploughed into a retainer wall at speed in excess of 200mph. If you don't get the gist of what we're saying here, simply heed this fact: Nascar is the most watched spectator sport in the North American continent.

It seems somewhat symbolic that Papyrus should choose now to release the latest, and most certainly the greatest in its line of Nascar simulations. And with respect and in remembrance of the late Dale Earnhardt, fans worldwide have been brought closer to the sport than ever before.

She's not much to look at...

First up, the front-end isn't much to write home about. There are still the basic options and race modes that were available in every incarnation of the series - testing, single race, championship and so-forth. However, it must be pointed out, the average sim is not judged by its credentials in the front-end area. It should also be noted though that Nascar 4 is the first in the series to offer a

cool opponent manager system that allows in-game management of entrant lists in any event or championship in which a player takes part.

All the boring bits aside, let's get to the guts of what makes or breaks a motor sport simulation: the rubber burning action, which for the uninitiated means driving the car. Upon first jumping into the seat of one of these 750hp beasts, the player is inundated with a glorious deep growl emanating from the idling engine. A simple tap of the throttle whilst in neutral is all that's needed to induce a spine-chilling roar that demonstrates the awesome gobbings of speed-producing potential lurking below the hood. And the car hasn't even moved yet. With full crew chief and spotter radio communications, the audio of Nascar 4 is right on par with high standard of the series.

...but she's got it where it counts

The amazing attention to detail which Papyrus has used to recreate every official circuit is breathtaking at the very least. Even the simplicity of the track surface has hit a

whole new level of realism; every crack, seam and black tyre mark is clear to behold. Both in-field and out-field, each and every circuit is recognisable from its real life counterpart. From the Christmas tree at Indianapolis to the 100,000-seat mega grandstand of Daytona, with trackside objects set to maximum, there isn't one building present in real life that has failed to make the transition to virtual simulation.

The cherry on this already scrumptiously delicious simulation is the migration of the Grand Prix Legends physics engine, or model, if you will. This facet of the sim should need no introduction when used in the same sentence as the name of Papyrus. The almost perfectly realistic chassis and engine emulation offers the most challenging and addictive feeling of actually sitting in the cockpit that we've ever experienced. With four-wheel independent logic behind the code, you'd be extremely hard pressed to get closer to the real thing without actually doing it for real.

Nascar 4 is without a doubt the latest benchmark for the genre, and with an Indy car based title sorely due, we can only wait and hope for the next helping of superlatives Papyrus sees fit to send our way!

Edward Fox

F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP

For those with a need for speed, and a will to turn right.

This sure ain't Nascar

Give him a nudge...

Does my bum look big in this?

Much like the McLaren team has dominated Formula One in recent years, Geoff Crammond has kept a stranglehold on the F1 simulation field for the past decade. His Grand Prix series, reaching its third iteration last year, always seems to possess just that fraction more horsepower than its rivals. Several contenders have arisen during that time, but none has ever managed to go head-to-head for the full length season.

Ubisoft's F1 Racing franchise has been thereabouts for a while now - a few points each race, with the occasional podium finish - yet never been able to sustain a serious championship challenge. However, the new one is cleverly called F1 Racing Championship, so maybe this time the French are in with a shot. But given Renault's recent performances in the real thing, maybe not... But anyway.

What was I talking about?

First impressions are overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, F1 RC is the Ferrari of F1 sims. By that I mean it looks utterly gorgeous. The cars appear solid, the scenery is convincing, there are no texture glitches (unlike GP3), and the pit crew is comprised of genuine polygon guys who, like, actually change tyres and replace nose cones and stuff (unlike GP3). Which is obviously excellent news.

As with all serious simulations, the race options span the standard range with little deviation, and are thus banal. Single race, Championship, Quick race, Testing: it's all rather predictable and stale. The Time Attack mode, where each section of a circuit must be completed within a certain time, is refreshing though it doesn't go far enough. The reason why sims have minimal appeal beyond avid devotees of the sport in question is not because they're too difficult but that they fail to grasp the dynamic of player reward. Aside from achieving a faster lap time or possibly winning a race, there's nothing to keep the player coming back. It might sound silly, but having to unlock cars and tracks is a great incentive. Better yet, a Career mode would add enormously to the long term appeal, and is entirely appropriate as well.

Still on the options, the superior replay facility is comprehensive, intuitive and can record as much of the race as there is hard disk space available. Plus, out of the box, F1 RC provides much better multiplayer support.

Moving onto the driving itself, whether F1 RC can be considered the Ferrari of F1 sims in this regard is less clear-cut but just as assured. In addition to looking spectacular, the game engine is frighteningly fast, once more drawing favour in comparison to GP3.

The sensation of speed has rarely been so well realised in computer form.

The driving physics work well because the cars feel weighty and the interaction between wheel and track is plausible. Each track has been modelled to feature all those small bumps and inclines present on each circuit yet are ignored by other sims in an effort to save on polygons. Their inclusion creates a more believable and challenging experience.

I'll decline from suggesting F1 Racing Championship has taken the chequered flag from Grand Prix 3, that would be too cliched. Nonetheless, it would be true.

David Wildgoose

JACK'S BACK

For some obscure legal reason, Jacques Villeneuve, former World Champion and fiancee of Dannii Minogue, has never featured in a Formula One game. No doubt disappointing countless Canadians in the process. They'll be happy this time, however. Villeneuve is right there on the Driver Select screen, just between The Shoe and Hakkers. Hurrah for that.

SERIOUS SAM

Egyptian-flavoured relief for those sick of shooting up in the sewer

The 2001 Salvation Army doorknock appeal: savage.

At least it's a sunny day

There is a fast growing perception in the world of games that the first person shooter, on the PC especially, has lost its way. They seem to have all inbred to the point where the genre is nothing but crate stacking, jumping puzzles and meaningless online mayhem. Many a player has stumbled down a pitch black corridor full of pitch black things, groping for a pitch black key to stick in pitch black lock that opens a pitch black door to another in an endless (pitch black) series of pitch black rooms. As many a teen poet has wailed, "Black is the colour of my heart, because black is the colour all around me." Gameplay-wise (*Nnngh! – Ed*) something has been sorely lacking.

Quite simply, the missing ingredient is fun. There have been great leaps in making the FPS more involving and entertaining over the years: Half Life, Deus Ex, No One Lives Forever. But they have been drops in the ocean, greedily consumed by the masses who must then pine over release schedules, looking at the same screenshots of Duke Nukem Forever forever... if you know what I mean. Waiting for the day when a developer will get serious about entertaining the masses. At last, such a developer has appeared. And they're from the Balkans.

A different kind of flying altogether
As you all know by now given our increasingly hysterical rants on the virtues of Croteam - the Team of Cro who can Do No Wrong - the Serious Engine is something rather special. Truly vast outdoor areas can be rendered, with plenty of power left over for dozens of slavering aliens and lens flares and the odd muzzle flash besides. Outdoor levels are well designed, with spaces carefully proportioned to help or confuse the player at any given point. Serious Sam doesn't spend all his time in sewers, either. Many a level takes place in courtyards the middle of the day,

45600   45600

14   80   42

I'm sure he'd be very nice if you got to know him socially

They Came From the Sky (tm)

Bridgestone Council?

establishing contrast between your enemies and the background for easy aiming.

But the most striking thing about Serious Sam is the game's ability to shock. Each new enemy is designed to be as menacing and evil-looking as possible, with jutting fangs and menacing gaits. Once one becomes familiar with their disposition and has a chance to read up on it's stats, the sense of humour inherent to the production begins to seep through. For instance, the Headless Rocketeers are undead antagonists with not just any rocket launchers. They fire "magic missiles." And Kleer Skeletons conjure two-balls, surely something to avoid.

Truly vast outdoor areas are rendered with plenty of power left over for dozens of slavering aliens

Mucho Grande

When Sam first sees a Headless Kamikaze dude come rushing over the hill, his gurgling battle cry stands out like a sore thumb. There isn't even time to pause and figure out how he can scream without a head, for mere seconds later dozens of his friends start pouring over the rise, moving unerringly towards you like any good computer opponent.

This sense of escalation runs right throughout the game; why throw one antagonist at the player when the engine can handle fifty? Thus the dominant mode of play for much of the time is running

backwards whilst dodging from side to side. To clear a room of monsters this can take a good minute or so, as endlessly spawning critters assault you from all sides.

As the action compounds so does the satisfaction, as the beefier weapons allow Sam to shatter foes that had previously required intensive whittling. All of the weapon models are really chunky and satisfying, even the replica Colt Single Action Army Sam starts off with. It at least comes with a Techno-Magical Ammunition Replentisher (sic), a highly scientific way of saying that it never runs out of bullets. From this starting point his guns only get more outlandish, culminating with a depleted-uranium-ball cannon, its oversized black cylinder looking patently ridiculous in Sam's mere human hands.

Screwdriver!

While the mangled English presented throughout the game is charming all by itself, fortunately for us Sam has a more concrete American accent and vernacular. His tone and subject matter are similar to Mr. Nukem's in Duke 3D, but his tongue-in-cheek approach to FPS gaming is largely untainted by strip club vulgarities. He will, for instance,

express his displeasure at the amount of fog on a given level, or whistle the Indiana Jones theme when a giant boulder attacks.

The boulder is, of course, not an isolated incident; rocks attack in greater numbers later on. The menus have that overwhelming layered effect you get when people with too much programming talent are let off the leash, and if you've got the juice then Serious Sam can drink it right up, all the way to 1600x1200 if you're game.

The primary multiplayer mode is co-operative, logical considering the nature of play. Even the networking options employed are innovative; Serious Sam makes split-screen play possible. A logical move when you think about it, for small networks with more players than PCs, or just a head-to-head bash with no messy cables to worry about. It's always nice when a developer understands that not everyone is stinking rich; Croteam have come this far by working entirely in their spare time.

Not everyone is going to want to rush out and buy this, for the simple reason that what you see is what you get. Mindless madcap action can get a little tiresome after five hours, and if played in such large chunks the meagre 13 levels of this release would be gone in no time. But for the casual gamer who's after a brief session of delightful hullabaloo, then this is easily the best contender since Doom.

James Cottee

PCPP

FOR
■ Revolutionary graphics engine
■ Frantic gameplay
■ Sense of humour

AGAINST
■ Shallow/frustrating
■ Bad indoor levels
■ Too short

OVERALL
Unreconstructed FPS hilarity

81%

AGE OF SAIL II

Has anyone seen my mizzen mast? It's mizzen. Bwaha.

ONLINE

www.northsails.com
Something to do
with sailing, I dunno,
do I look like a bosun
or something?

PCPP

OVERALL
*Could have been
great but ends up
lost at sea*

70%

Shiver me lanyard! I've holed them in the hold!

Land ho! Crunch...

HOIST THE BOWSPRIT

If Akella, the game's Russian developer, had put as much thought into the gameplay as they did research, Age of Sail II would have revolutionised the industry. It covers naval combat from 1775 to 1812 and has navies from France, England, Denmark, Naples, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the US as well as seventeen different vessels. Fans of naval history, if no one else, will find this game truly, truly sexy.

Complex. Slow. Stately. Bloody Irritating. These are all words that could be used to describe Age Of Sail II. It's where the thinking man's (and woman's) strategy game makes a comeback with rare historical accuracy, attention to detail and need for stratagem and forethought. And it's not nearly as fun as what it should be.

Creating a modern version of Ancient Art of War at Sea sounds good in theory. Yet detailed wargaming, informed by realtime modern thought, is a genre that has never been a critical or marketplace darling. And it remains that way because the games are produced in this style to be ponderous things groaning under the weight of their own indulgence.

Belay that

A healthy portion of criticism against the original Age of Sail was that the interface was far too complicated. On this evidence, it must have been nightmarish. Even with the aid of the in-game manual, mastering your fleet proves quite a steep challenge. Simple moving about and fighting is no problem whatsoever; indeed it's actually quite elegant to watch your ship gracefully cut through the water - and using the zooming camera, you can watch her from horizon to close up. It's when you have assign your crew to doing detailed work, avoid enemy fire, set sails, get off your own shots, all while avoiding hostile forts, that things get to be simply too much. You don't get to watch the ship-to-ship combat because you're simply too damn busy pressing mouse buttons. Taking place in realtime means that the game never gives a break to try and sort out these messy details. At slow speeds, before the vessels close with each other, no problem but it's impossible later in the game. Thankfully, there are several speed settings on the game that allow you to jump to thirty two times normal game speed. A life saver for those who don't have ten minutes to wait for the action to begin.

All ahead full

Historical campaigns mean that the ship-to-ship combat will take place over a variety of terrains. Okay, they're all water, but water in different parts of the world. From the great Nelson's stand against the Spanish (*Kiss me Hardy - Ed*) through to the cleansing of the pirates of the Caribbean, the missions are varied and make considerable use of forts, which can make or break you entire strategy with one landborne fusillade. Watch out for ambush tactics and always try to be the fastest ship in the water. It's more important than guns.

At the very least, Age of Sail II is graphically pleasing. The ships are beautiful, the land gorgeous and close up enough on the decks and you can see the sailors hard at work. Damage could be a little better handled though. Just boring holes in the ships isn't enough.

It's not much fun to play, but it should be. A nice try but ultimately a let down.

Christian Read
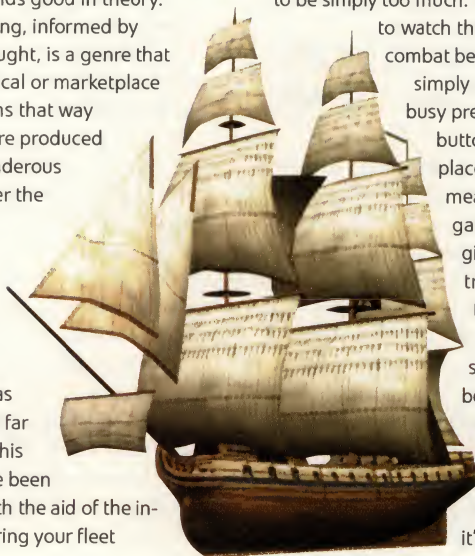
EVIL ISLANDS

Subtitled 'when Islands Go Bad'

PCPP

OVERALL
*A welcome change
from the current crop
of RPG's out there*

79%

An amoeba digesting a french fry?

LOOK, SHUT UP, MATE

Zak, the game's protagonist, is quite possibly the most annoying character I've ever come across. Zak talks when you move him. Zak talks when you don't move him. 'Have you had enough of life?' says Zak when attacking enemies. No, Zak, I have not had enough of life, but I've certainly had enough of your obnoxious twaddling, you little pansy.
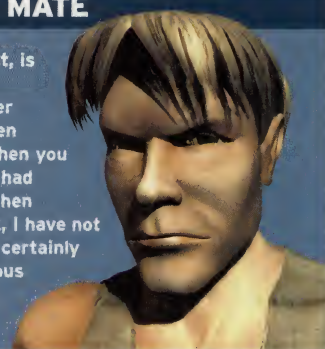
Rod Stewart? Can I have your autograph?

Let's get rowdy!

This game is called Evil Islands. It is sub-titled 'Curse of the Lost Soul'. It has goblins, orcs and men who all have 'the' in their names – Erfar the Silvertongue, Billy the Axe, Johnny the Stereotype. Though one was not seen directly, it is presumable that dragons also make an appearance somewhere, possibly in dark, treasure filled caves. Sword swinging, spell casting and item managing are all abundant. And although all of these things feature prominently in almost every other RPG on this green, dwarf-filled earth, this game is not a cliche.

Surprising, but true. Through sheer ingenuity of application and design, Evil Islands manages to skilfully steer well away from the beaten path of its ilk and create for itself a new track that, though a bit rough in places, is a pleasure to travel. It's a good thing too, because we all know where the *other* track ends - that's right, the Ye Olde Lands of Bargaine Binne. How Nival's darling managed to avoid this fate can be summed up succinctly with one word: innovation.

No orc is an island

It sounds like a corporate catch cry, but it's really the only way to describe the game. It's innovative in the sense that, all cliches aside, Evil Islands is truly a different gaming experience. Gluing conventional RPG bravado and a 3D RTS inspired engine together with a big blob of stealth might sound like a strange idea, but it works surprisingly well.

By allowing players to choose from four different types of movement modes (run, walk, sneak and crawl), it offers a decent amount of freedom when asking players to decide on how they would like to tackle a particular situation. Johnny Bravado types who like to solve problems with a sword can simply run in and hack to their heart's content. The more subtle among us, however, might opt for a sneaking, covert approach, either avoiding enemies altogether or backstabbing the more alert among their ranks. It's innovative, it's interesting and it's good fun.

However, the rotating, top down, 3D camera engine is a problem. There's no denying it looks fantastic (with the day/night/weather effects being a special treat) and is complemented perfectly by audio excellence throughout, but is it suited to game like this? Understandably it allows for more player control, with all the zooming, panning and so forth, but this isn't something that's enjoyable to do in an RPG where such options furnish no discernable advantages. In a strategy game it allows for strategic opportunity; in an RPG it allows for annoyance, especially when trees and other pretties constantly get in the way of the monster that's hacking you to death.

While lacking the pizzazz to make it a classic, Evil Islands is noteworthy nonetheless simply for the fact that it is something that has been wanting in the current crop of cookie-cutter RPG's out there- a good shot of clean, fun innovation.

Daniel Staines

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE

All your Orcs are belong to us...

Time out! I've dropped a contact lens

Fendrigal, those things keep gobbing on us

Warcraft 2 was a classic. The pinnacle of the old two dimensional top down real time strategy game. But it's been a form rife with cloning and very uninspired homage and outright rip-offs, something that keeps gaming from moving forward artistically. When Kingdom Under Fire arrived in the PCPP office, all we knew about it was that it had been bandied about as a sort of Warcraft 2.5. Cutting through the bollocks, it's not. It's an attempt to do something different in RTS but thankfully it stands on its own merits. Phantagram, a Korean company that is still pretty much a newcomer has done a good job creating a playable, addictive and enjoyable game. Even if it is just a mish-mash of Diablo and Warcraft.

Loading KUF up and checking out the art is a bit of a disappointment. It's all washed out and nothing seems to really stand out in terms of style. It runs best in 800x600 with 16-bit colour. There's some pretty ordinary character animations, with the exception of the demons that fade in and out of visibility and some of the dungeon adventures, specifically sun through stained glass, but overall it's quite an average visual package.

Obvious Connections

The game play is nothing particularly new or innovative and it's where the comparisons between Warcraft and KUF are the most visible and obvious connections occur. Human and Orc armies clash, and all the tropes of the top down RTS are present. Start out with peasants to construct barracks, farms, research platforms, then get them to mine ore, gold and magical energy. The more complex the mission the greater the range of units to access following a basic tech tree model. All in all, standard stuff.

Fortunately, once units are built, things get shaken up a bit. Nearly every unit type in the game has a special power. Knights can charge and use a short term magic armour, Clerics can turn undead and heal. The horrid Shadow Puppets burrow into the ground and surprise foes. Air units cannot be assaulted by melee units. Nearly every unit type can be somehow upgraded and gather experience which serves to neatly sidestep the usual dull mathematics of unit-on-unit warfare. Except there's one particular problem with this otherwise inspired attempt to mix the formulas up. With a limit on how many units can be controlled at one

Birdie num-num

Xentor, the photocopier's on fire again!

Keldinar, we have to work on your spellcasting. Pink just isn't evil!

time, and battles quickly growing, micro management becomes hellish in a fight.

Air units are also terribly unbalancing to gameplay. With serious firepower, extreme speed and the heady advantage of being threatened by only missile fire and immune to even most hero powers, Storm Riders, Black Wyverns and the others essentially win any game they're playing.

In a complete swipe from Total Annihilation: Kingdoms, the great monarchs and heroes of the realm take part of the action. The Vampire Richter, the blatantly homosexual young Knight Currian, Moonlight the great mage, the Mystery Knight with a strange

dimensional rift at his bidding and Rick Blood, the Dark Emperor. There are seven independently playable characters. Each of these characters has specific powers, like a flaming sword, chain lightning or a discharge of energy. Many times you'll be surrounded only to be saved by an energy blast or hail storm.

Certain missions allow the character units to be played uniquely. These are simple goaled things. Get such and such an item or even as simple as getting the character to one end of a map. This top-down adventuring gives it a surface similarity to Diablo. More than surface as a matter of fact.

It plays out the same, including traps, a variety of ghastly beasts and all sorts of critters as well as magic. The special effects of the various spells look a lot sweeter in the dungeons. There are also creatures inside these sections that don't appear on the RTS battlefield. Lizardmen, Dwarves and Giant Spiders are notable, if unoriginal, inclusions.

Familiarity breeds contempt

Because it is an RTS game, Kingdom Under Fire suffers problems inherent in the form. Games quickly become over large and micro managing goes from being the irritant it is in small games to a full on un-fun nightmare. What specifically drags down KUF is the poor art, the lack of interaction and inability to influence plot.

Despite these flaws, and the fact it has the immediate originality of a prank phone call, perseverance will reveal Kingdom Under Fire does add something new to RTS. Not much, but combine it with what had been lifted from the classics and you have to come away with a grudging respect for the synthesis of the game if nothing else. It's a lot of fun. It's a good game and worth a look-in for people who want to kill a few hours.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR
- Spell effects
- Diablo bits
- Special weapons

AGAINST
- Yawn! Been here
- Warcraft 2.5
- Lacklustre graphics

OVERALL
Diverting, but mostly a familiar blend of Warcraft and Diablo

78%

BATTLE FOR NABOO

Anyone else think Naboo is a really stupid name for a planet?

Hands off my wookie!

Ah yes, the rings of Uranus

Blue circle thing ahead, sir

This is an awful piece of rubbish. And it is truly fulfilling to get that off my chest. If there are anxieties that swim through the average reviewer's head, they're the kind that whisper, "Ooh, I don't really like this game but gee, is it really that bad?" and "What if I were developing this game? If you squint at the screen sideways..." The usual anxieties had no chance with Battle for Naboo. It's a derivative, awkward, dull, ugly action title that should never have seen the light of day, much less appear as part of LucasArts' premier franchise, Star Wars.

I hate Ewoks

Set amidst the turmoil of Episode I, Battle for Naboo involves a bunch of characters not even seen in the film, in action sequences not even seen in the film. Some twaddle about the Trade Federation. Your character's name is Sykes. He's some bootlicker who has just enough brains to follow orders - but only if they're simple and repeated often.

And ugly? Is it 2001? I haven't seen anything as dog-ugly as Battle for Naboo for many years. There are moments of visual interest but you're jolted back into reality by some awful animation before too long. At times I asked, "Is this even detecting my card?" But

alas, that is what comes from N64 ports. Sure, the in-game visuals are ugly but man, the menus are downright classy! Confused? Me too. Why put so much effort in the front window, when there's nothing in the living room? What the hell does it matter if the opening title screen looks good if the rest of the game is uglier than Hugh without make-up?

Rest assured, visuals don't mean a pinch if it's an awesomely engaging game, though. Battle for Naboo is NOT an awesomely engaging game. You scoot around the countryside, shooting down Trade Federation droids and other nasties (I use the term loosely), while travelling onwards to some stunningly final battle, I'm sure. No one will ever know, of course, because the action is so repetitive, the first half dozen missions are an absolute chore.

On the plus side, there are a number of different vehicles to use. On the negative, they handle much the same. EXACTLY the same. There's a secondary fire option that helps a bunch in the button mashing stakes. Control of these so-called vehicles is abysmal. My recently departed mini has a better turning circle than these.

I'm sure it makes good economic sense to do virtually no development, have some Star Wars music in the background and flog it at the highest price, but this kind of tactic fools no one. Incidentally, if the music was absent, you would barely know it was Star Wars. We know LucasArts is having a rough go of it, reforming after major staff changes but this standard of game is unacceptable. So LucasArts, when you remember how to make games again, let us know.

John Dewhurst

NBA LIVE 2001

EA Sports is back for 2001 with another strong drive to the bucket...

ONLINE

www.hoophall.com/history/original_rules.htm
In the beginning there were only 13 rules, a soccer ball and a couple of peach baskets. Ah, the good old days

PCPP

OVERALL
A quality basketball sim with only a few flaws

81%

Where's Fat Albert?

I've never been so touched...

Stayin' Alive!

Why is the chicken nervous?

NEW FOR 2001

As you can tell by the title there have been a few of these updating yearly. Other than the graphical improvements there are new features. All-Star teams have been included from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s meaning you have access to Pistol Pete, Wilt, Dr J, Bird and Jordan. There are new post moves so you can back in, force hooks or even do Dominique Up and Under moves. There's online support. You can even scan in your face and map it onto your newly created player if you are that way inclined.

N BA Live 2001 has all the glitz of the real thing. The reflections on the court are spot on, the crowd seems to be made of a sea of individuals (*Woah, Zen – Ed*) and the players' faces and motion are more realistic than ever. Needless to say, you can easily pick most of the players by appearance, if not playing style.

The presentation is usual EA quality with mainly slick interfaces and option screens. Some things get a bit tricky like three team player trades, but that's to be expected.

Three pointer

Amongst all the shine there are some things that are not to be expected. 2001 has yet to fix the dunk versus jump shot problem. I don't know how many times I exclaimed "but Grant Hill drinks Sprite!" He would step up to the hoop and do a timid jumper instead of ramming it home. He'd miss too, because you have to hold the shot button down for a decent J. Then I'd have Outlaw at the post back in, spin, take one step to the centre, press shoot and watch him take a couple of steps forward and dunk it home. I'd think... "ah ha! I've worked it out," only to see dunker par excellence Hill spin inside and take another bad jump shot from a hop away from an invitingly open basket.

The control swings from fantastic to annoying. I know that as soon as you get the ball you are meant to be in control but sometimes this just isn't practical like when the computer has your player grab a rebound by leaping out of court: as soon as you get control you are out of bounds. What is worst is when you pass the ball to a player who is for no reason already standing out of court. If I had done that in my under 12's I wouldn't have been let back on. Mrs Broome would have seen to that and added some suicide runs into the mix.

Technical foul!

Rebounding in this game also would have had Mrs Broome screaming for subs. The ball comes off the ring at odd angles making predicting the boards really hard; beyond that, your computer controlled team mates seem to wander towards the ball without any haste. They look like they'd rather be making

breakfast cereal ads. I had statistically the best rebounding team, after I added my 6 foot 2 self to the Magic, but strangely we were out rebounded almost every game. It was nothing but lazy ball. The game also likes to inflict dry spells on you where open shots rim out and forcing me to exclaim "but Grant Hill drinks Sprite" more and more.

Overall NBA Live 2001 is still a good game. It is great in so many respects that you get quite surprised and angry when the players do dumb things, like the things I've mentioned. The franchise mode is a blast if you have the time to invest as is being able to match up Dr J versus Magic or playing out the speculated Wilt versus Jordan one-on-one battle. At its best, Live does tap the rush of the real game. When you actually manage the cross-over, spin, split the defence and then double clutch dunk through the traffic just see if you don't exclaim: "Grant Hill *does* drink Sprite!"

Timothy C. Best

IN REVIEW

The silicon state of the art

TECH

Positioned somewhere between the Magna Carta and Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in terms of cultural significance, comes another PC Powerplay Tech Section...

First up this month, we have the seminal CD-burner Powertest. 12 different CD-RW drives have been tortured, interrogated and subjected to cruel and unusual tests in order to determine their merit. With prices falling through the floor, there is no excuse not to own a CD burner. Several of the burners featured are now available for less than $300 and, at this rate, we should see a low-end CD burner for less than $200 within the year.

Most importantly, we have a review of the Hercules 3D Prophet III, courtesy of Monsieur Galle at Guillemot. The 3D Prophet III is the first GeForce3 card to hit Australia, and should be on shelves by the time that you read this. After extensive testing in the labs, we're all convinced of the GeForce3's worth. The all-new architecture, stunning feature set and excellent performance give me a colossal, oak-tree sized wood (*He writes all his own stuff, you know - Ed*). Simply put, disregarding Kid Loco and Garlic Eclairs, the 3D Prophet III is the best thing to come out of France in years.

Nevertheless, some people are concerned by the price tag. For me, this isn't a detractor - with nVidia, you get what you pay for, and the GeForce3 is an awesomely advanced piece of kit. Calling the GeForce3 overpriced is like describing a Porsche as a rip-off; it may be expensive, but it's a genuine feat of engineering and worth every penny. For what it's worth, the GeForce3 outperforms high-end CAD solutions, at a fraction of the cost. Ergo, if you can't afford it, bugger off and buy a Voodoo Banshee.

We also have a review of Pioneer's Games PC, the Asus V7100 Deluxe videocard and the Guillemot ISIS. The 3Com Wireless LAN, reviewed on page 101, is one of the more odd products we've seen. If you've ever had a hankering to play multiplayer Virtual Valerie from the comfort of the laundry closet, like I certainly have (*see what I mean? - Ed*), this is well worth examining.

Enjoy the issue. Cheerio!

hughns@next.com.au
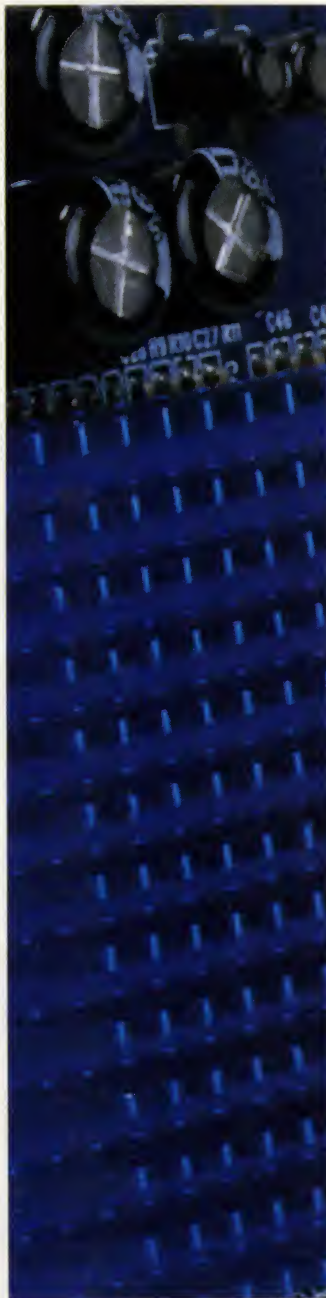
THE PCPP POWERTEST SYSTEM

The Power Award is given to the highest performing product each month. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.

The Value Award is given each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product, such as added connectivity or software bundle.

For some PowerTests, power will be more important than value. For others, value will be paramount. That's why at the end of each PowerTest we give a PCPP Gold Award to the product that, all things considered, is the best buy.

THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.

Disco Inferno

CR-RW POWERTEST BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH

Recordable CD technology has matured considerably over the past several years. Easy installation, generous software packages, and drives that actually work separate today's burners from those of yesteryear. Also, advancements in burner technology have made using a recordable CD drive an infinitely more enjoyable experience - they are now faster and more reliable. Whether you are a game developer, professional musician, warez p4reak or simply a hobbyist, there is no surer way to backup and distribute your work than with a recordable CD drive. And as packet-writing support becomes more robust and the CD-RW format more prevalent, CD-recordable technology may yet fulfil its role as a 1.44MB floppy-disk replacement.

In light of this, recordable CD drives have become virtually *de rigeur* in mid-range to high-end PCs. An entry-level CD-RW drive can now be had for less than $300. For simple data backup and archiving, these products should be fine. On the flipside, more expensive drives from the likes of Yamaha and Iomega should fulfil all the requirements of the CD-RW power user.

CD-R vs CD-RW

CD-R stands for CD Recordable. CD-R discs can only be written once; once written, the data is read-only and cannot be erased. For removable storage, CD-R makes a compelling choice. It offers a low cost per megabyte, as well as near-universal acceptance in modern PCs. CD Media prices are at an all time low. Blank CD-R discs can be bought, in bulk, for less than $1. For distribution of data, image storage, multimedia presentations, and training and marketing materials, no proprietary solution can hope to approach CD-R's installed base of CD-ROM playback devices. And although the 650MB storage capacity on a CD-R disk pales in comparison to the 2.6GB or more promised DVD-RAM, it will be several years before a clear successor emerges.

CD-RW stands for CD ReWritable. CD-RW discs let you erase data at will, allowing you to use them over and over again. CD-RW disks are more expensive than CD-R discs, at about $6 per disk, depending on the manufacturer. CD-RW discs have lower reflectivity than their CD-R counterparts, so they are generally incompatible with older CD-ROM and DVD drives. All of the drives featured in the PowerTest are CD-RW compliant.

SCSI vs IDE

Traditionally, recordable CD technology was a SCSI-only game: several years ago, IDE drives were plagued by the dreaded buffer underrun, as well as inconsistent audio performance and poor application support. The times have changed. Proprietary technologies like BurnProof, as well as larger internal caches, better software and faster computers have vastly improved the reliability of IDE drives.

SCSI purists may berate you if you go with IDE. Ignore this rubbish: While SCSI-based drives are marginally more reliable than IDE models, it comes at a considerable cost premium. Not only is an IDE drive cheaper, and in most instances just as capable, but it also eliminates the need for a PCI hogging SCSI card. Also note that speed has nothing to do with the interface technology, only the marked speed of the drive.

Burn, Baby, Burn!

Nevertheless, although the problem has become less acute, some IDE burners can still encounter a buffer underrun. To minimise the possibility of this occurring, the recorder should be placed on a different IDE channel than the intended source. IDE is notoriously poor at multitasking on a single channel. With most new systems, the hard disk is connected to the primary IDE channel and the CD-ROM/DVD drive is hooked to the secondary IDE channel. If you decide to add a CD-RW drive, it would be best to move both the hard disk and CD-ROM onto the same primary channel, as master and slave respectively. Then, you should add the new CD-RW drive to the secondary channel as master.

YAMAHA
CRW2100E

DISTRIBUTOR	Yamaha Australia
PRICE	$599
URL	www.yamaha.co.jp/english

Yamaha has a long standing reputation for producing high quality optical drives, and the CRW2100E is no exception. The CRW2100E is the first 16x burner to arrive in Australia and with the Plextor 16x still unavailable, it remains the fastest drive on the local market.

The CRW2100E, which currently resides in Harry's PC, burns CDs at an impressive 16x, rewrites CD-RW media at 10x and reads at 40x. To give you an idea of the speed, consider that an audio CD (79 minutes/700Mb) can be mastered in under 5 minutes. With the drive's newly adopted Partial CAV writing method, you can write a disc by directly transferring content from a 32x or faster CD-ROM source. MP3 fans, take note: this baby can do DAE at the full 40x.

While not a 'real-world' test, the CD Speed 99 benchmark showed phenomenal results, with the CRW2100E beating the competition by a considerable margin. Digital Audio Extraction was similarly impressive, with results from CD DAE 99 topping the PowerTest.

Although no BURN-Proof or similar technology is provided, the buffer is a generous 8Mb. Reliability is further enhanced by support for Yamaha's Pure-Phase Laser system.

The CRW2100E is an attractive looking unit. The build quality is first rate, and the whole unit has a reassuringly solid feel about it. The installation and software guides are helpful, and have good diagrams making installation a no-brainer. In the box you'll find the usual suite of Adaptec software, including EasyCD Creator, DirectCD and TakeTwo. EasyCD Creator is a full-featured mastering package, DirectCD is a packet writing program, and TakeTwo is a system backup and archiving utility.

Outstanding performance and excellent build quality make this the standard against which all other optical drives can be judged and found wanting. The fastest writing speed always commands a premium price, but for us, the CRW2100E still represents excellent value.

IOMEGA
ZIPCD

DISTRIBUTOR	Iomega
PRICE	$649
URL	www.iomega.com.au

Iomega, the Utah company renowned for Zip drives, is the world's foremost purveyor of data storage and backup devices. The ZipCD is a high performance solution, burning at a healthy 12x, rewriting at 10x and reading at 32x. The drive also supports Sanyo's BURN-Proof technology.

Until now, writing to a CD-R disc required delivering a steady stream of data to the disc. If the drive's cache ran out of data - which causes the data stream to be interrupted - a buffer underrun would occur, shutting down the writing laser. This produces a coaster. BURN-Proof doesn't promise to completely eliminate buffer underruns, but it does dramatically reduce the frequency in which they occur. BurnProof reduces the danger they pose by allowing a drive to precisely reposition the laser at the location where writing left off. In the real world, BurnProof worked as advertised, kicking in when heavy multitasking left the buffer empty. According to Sanyo, each time BURN-Proof kicks in, it increases burn time by around half a second.

The package includes not only a hefty multi-lingual manual on setting up and using the drive itself, but also a volume on the burning software that accompanies the drive. The software package is extensive and intuitive. Iomega's one-step software installation provides plenty of hand-holding for neophytes, as do the bundles versions of Adaptec EasyCD Creator and Adaptec DirectCD. Although it doesn't support overburning, the drive works well with with 700Mb (80minute) discs - Iomega have, as a measure of faith, bundled the drive with two blank 700Mb discs. A rewritable disc would have been nice.

Assuming you can ignore the high price, the Iomega ZipCD is a classy production. Swift write speeds and laudable ease-of-use make this a solid choice. If you're prepared to scout around, you should find this drive up for significantly less than Iomega's recommended retail price.

HP
CD-WRITER 9500I

DISTRIBUTOR	HP Australia
PRICE	$599
URL	www.hp.com.au

Using the Sony Spressa mechanism, the HP 9500I CD-Writer is a competent performer, burning CD-Rs at 10x, rewriting CD-RW media at 8x and reading CD-ROMs at 32x. The drive has a chunky 4Mb buffer, which should eliminate most writing errors. The excellent build quality of the 9500I is reflected in the sculptured grey fascia. A cornflower blue open/close button rounds out this appealing package.

The included software is excellent for beginners, but will fail to satisfy more advanced users. The MyCD step-by-step wizard, which resides in the system tray, becomes cumbersome after the first few procedures, and you can't bypass the automatic wizard which pops up every time a blank disc is inserted. Worse, the user-friendly software offers no way to create disc images or to write a .bin image directly to a disc.

It's not mentioned on the box, but the 9500I comes bundled with HP's CD labelling software, as well as the patented Neato label application device. Assuming you own an inkjet printer, the Neato system allows you to create and print stylish label and jewel case inserts for your completed CD-R discs.

What sets this drive apart from its lower-spec sibling is the installation software - just pop the CD into your computer's existing CD-ROM drive, then the software scans your system and generates custom installation instructions. There's even a short video-clip in .AVI format, which demonstrates exactly how one should install the drive. Sadly, if you don't have a CD-ROM drive, you are out of luck, as the Lilliputian manual only covers the basics.

With its relatively high price and average performance, the HP 9500I CD-RW drive is a respectable, if not an exciting unit. Apparently, HP are preipping a high-performance 16x model for launch, so this may be worth waiting for.

| | POWER | | VALUE | | EXTRAS |

CREATIVE
121032

DISTRIBUTOR	Creative
PRICE	$599
URL	www.australia.creative.com

As the name suggests, the Creative 121032 burns at 12x, rewrites at 10x and reads at 32x. You may be surprised to know that this drive is, in fact, a rebadged Plextor. It offs a 2Mb buffer and support for Sanyo's increasingly popular BURN-Proof standard.

In the past, the one problem that has thwarted more CD burning attempts than any other is the hated buffer-underrun. While burning, data must be spooled from supplied to the CD-RW as a steady, uninterrupted stream. If this stream of data is interrupted, the CD-RW will run out of data to burn, the laser will turn off and the CD will 'coaster'. BURN-Proof is a combination of hardware and firmware built right into the Creative 121032, which finally kisses buffer underruns goodbye.

To test BURN-Proof out, we burnt a CD at 12x while running Deus Ex in the background. To our relief, the CD was perfectly mastered. In light of this, surfing the Internet, listening to music or even watching a DivX flick is all in the realm of possibilities when using BURN-Proof. Remember, though, that doing other tasks while making a CD can significantly increase the burning time. With this in mind, the 2Mb buffer shouldn't be that much of a hindrance.

Another feature of the 121032 is support for CD-Text. This is the latest extension of the Audio CD standard, and additional information such as the title of the CD, the name of the artist and track titles can be stored. CD Text information can be displayed by the newer generation of audio CD players.

One of the best software packages is included with the Creative 121032 CD-RW drive. Copies of Nero 5.0, Prassi abCD, the Flip Album CD Maker and Creative LAVA! are great additions to the package. The Creative 121032 is a solid burner that should satisfy newcomers and upgraders alike. It's not the fastest drive we've seen, but the solid feature set and overall performance should keep most users happy.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	

RICOH
MP9120

DISTRIBUTOR	Aus PC-Market
PRICE	$588
URL	www.auspcmarket.com.au

The Ricoh MP9120 is not only a CD-RW, but also a DVD-ROM in the same unit. Using an advanced, high performance pick-up head that incorporates two laser diodes, the MP9120 not only boasts write speeds of 12x, rewrites at 10x and reading at 10x, but it can also read DVD-ROM discs at a lusty 8x. This saves space by taking up one less drive bay and IDE connector, but it does restrict you from making direct disc to disc copies. Unless, of course, you want to invest in an additional CD-ROM drive.

With a 2Mb buffer and Ricoh's patented JustLink circuitry, burning should happen virtually glitch free. JustLink is an anti buffer underrun technology, which is conceptually similar to BURN-Proof. Basically, JustLink constantly verifies how much data is available in the buffer memory. If the amount of available data falls below a certain pre-defined point, the drive is temporarily halted until such time as the buffer is re-filled. It's at this point that a small link is made in the CD, in order to mark the physical area at which writing should resume. In this way, writing can continue as normal, and the disk itself can be read without problems. It's highly advanced, using gaps of only 2 microns, compared to the 40 microns gaps used by the Burn-Proof technology.

Unfortunately, we cannot report that this drive is without issue or its fair share of problems. Using certified 12x blank media we saw write errors at full speed, and even with Ricoh's own CDR-W media, the drive acted oddly, sometimes not even acknowledging a CD-RW disc in the drive at all. Even with the latest firmware, it is quite obvious that Ricoh have some issues remaining with this ambitious drive.

It's annoying, but the drive is locked as a Region 4 DVD-ROM, making it impossible to play overseas DVD-ROMs. The Richo combo unit is a nice idea that doesn't quite work as hoped.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	

RICOH
MP7120A

DISTRIBUTOR	Aus PC-Market
PRICE	$412
URL	www.auspcmarket.com.au

The Ricoh MP7120A burns CD-R discs at 12x, rewrites CD-RW media at 10x and reads CD-ROM discs at 32x. Despite the lack of JustLink, the integrated 4Mb buffer should provide ample for most requirements.

The MP7120A is an attractive looking drive and, while working at full speed, the drive remains relatively quiet. The MP7120A is solidly built, in-line with our expectations from a company like Ricoh.

If all you care about is speed, the Ricoh has it in spades. The MP7120A out-performed almost every other drive available in its class. The Ricoh took less than 5.5 minutes to write 400MB to CD-RW in our packet-writing test, more than 90 seconds faster than the HP 9500i.

In the single-session data burn to CD-R, the MP7120A copied a 500MB directory in an unparalleled 5.5 minutes, besting even the Creative 121032. Incidentally, if you plan to write at 12x, you should make sure you're using high-quality media, rated for 12x drives.

The drive performed remarkable well in the lab tests thanks, no doubt, in part to its use of Nero 5.0 software, which takes a less conservative approach to caching files than the more popular Adaptec EasyCD Creator. Nero 5.0, which is developed by German based Ahead software, is the favourite CD mastering software of tech savvy burners everywhere. The copying utility is a real gem, allowing you to defeat all manner of copy protection schemes, which wily publishers may have implemented.

The Ricoh MP7120A is an excellent drive, flaunting superior build quality and performance. The only caveat is the sparse documentation and lack of a printed manual, as well as a rather weak software package - Nero 5.0 is a great general-purpose program, but could have been supplemented by a more rounded overall package. However, if you've already got the software, and don't care for documentation, the MP7120A comes highly recommended.

POWER	
VALUE	
EXTRAS	

AOPEN
CRW-1232

DISTRIBUTOR	FAT Computers
PRICE	$399
URL	www.fatcomputers.com

■ AOpen is a company that produces almost every component that makes up a PC. Probably most recognisable for its range of motherboards, AOpen has also been producing optical drives for quite some time. The CRW-1232, which is essentially a rebadged Ricoh drive, writes CD-R media at an impressive 12x, rewrites at 10x, and reads CD-Rom discs at 32x.

Although not as advanced as BURN-Proof, the included Optimal Power Control (OPC) technology significantly boosts recording reliability. OPC continually monitors signal levels during recording and adjusts laser power to compensate for a dirty or inferior quality disc. This feature ensures a flat signal, significantly enhancing reliability. Coupled with a 4Mb buffer, this is a seriously dependable drive.

Nero 5.0 software takes care of CD writing, offering an easy-to-use yet powerful interface. Nero InCD is a simple drag and drop packet writing tool, which allows you to write, add, and delete files and folders onto a CD-RW as easy as onto a floppy. You also get a fairly mediocre MP3 encoder/decoder package and a retail copy of Norton Ghost for imaging your hard disk for backup purposes. Norton Ghost allows you to save and compress the entire contents of your drive into one file. This can be spanned over several CDs if necessary. You can restore your hard disk to the original content in minutes, or clone your system onto a new computer.

In a bid to cash in on the MP3 frenzy, the box features a huge MP3 logo - ignore the hype. The Nero 5 recording software is able to handle the Mp3 format but, besides this, there is absolutely nothing that makes the CRW-1232 a more capable MP3 recorder than any other CD-RW drive. In its favour, the Aopen CRW-1232 is very cheap and full featured at $399.

COMPRO
CDRW-7586

DISTRIBUTOR	Aus PC-Market
PRICE	$330
URL	www.auspcmarket.com.au

■ This budget CD-RW kit is getting a bit long-in-the tooth, with write speeds of 8x, rewrites at 4x and reading at 32x. That said, the Compro did provide decent benchmark results within its own category, easily outpacing the likes of the Hewlett Packard 9140i drive. The CD-RW and DAE speeds were particularly commendable, with the CDRW-7586 coming close to the top of its league. The 2Mb of buffer is typical of a low-end drive. It should provide adequate protection from buffer underruns at 8x, assuming you don't attempt to multitask heavily. As with most other budget drives, Sanyo's BURN-Proof technology is notably absent from the specification list.

Like Smart & Friendly before it, Compro isn't a brand name to inspire much confidence. Not surprisingly, the build quality of the CDRW-7586 was a little below par, with the drive casing noticeably more flimsy than the competition. In fact, the casing on our review model was a little loose on one side, exposing a few millimetres of the PCB. While this had no discernible impact upon the performance and reliability, it left us somewhat disappointed in an otherwise impressive performance.

As usual, the basic Adaptec software suite is included. Easy CD Creator is the world's most popular general-purpose disc creation and copying package; DirectCD is packet writing software that lets CDs work like ordinary random access media, allowing you to drag and drop files direct to a CD-RW drive letter. Both programs are easy to install, intuitive and deceptively powerful.

The Compro CDRW-7586 CD-RW drive is worth a cursory glance if you're on an ultra tight budget, but we would suggest saving your cash and looking elsewhere for a more quality solution. For a few more clams, much more competitive CD-RW solutions are available.

ASUS
CRW-0804F

DISTRIBUTOR	Achieva
PRICE	$310
URL	www.achieva.com.au

■ The CRW-0804F is a budget drive, with run-of-the-mill specifications. The drive writes to CD-R discs at 8x, rewrites at 4x, and reads at a maximum of 32x. The drive has a 2Mb buffer, and boasts Optimal Power Control (OPC) for increased error correction.

The CRW-0804F is an attractive and sporty looking unit, with a reassuringly solid feel. Like other Asus products, the CRW-0804F includes a decent sized manual with generous illustrations and useful tutorials. There is even a fascinating glossary section, which describes in detail the mechanics of burning a CD.

Sadly, performance was considerably below average, right across the board. The CRW-0804F performed sluggishly in both CD WinBench 99, and was the most CPU intensive CD-RW drive we tested. For Digital Audio Extraction (ripping a CD to .wav), the CRW-0804F fared particularly badly, operating at under half the speed of the Compro unit.

The drive comes with a copy of Ahead software's Nero 5.0, a powerful mastering suite. Much to our chagrin, the version included in the box will only work with Asus branded drives. Nero 5.0 is comprised of the Burning ROM, In CD 3.0 and Nero MediaPlayer. InCD 3.0 is packet writing software similar to Adaptec's DirectCD, while the Nero MediaPlayer is basic and versatile playback software. The MediaPlayer should be uninstalled in favour of Winamp, Sonique or any other more refined Mp3 software. For a limited time, the drive is packaged with 10 high-speed CR-R discs, as well as 4 CD-RW discs. This is an excellent value-added bonus, particularly if you are keen to get burning right away. Nevertheless, at over $300, the CRW-0804F is priced too high for the budget market, and performs at a level that won't impress the performance segment.

POWER	
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ACER
CRW8432IA

DISTRIBUTOR	EYO Technologies
PRICE	$235
URL	www.eyo.com.au

The Acer CRW8432IA is a basic, low cost drive that burns at 8x, rewrites at 4x, and reads at 32x. A small 2Mb buffer is included. Although performance using CD Winbench 99 was on par with the rest of the field, the Acer suffered from a variety of irritating anomalies when reading. Digital Audio Extraction was marked by constant 'popping' noises, making it virtually useless for CD to Mp3 mastering. The drive also refused to read a variety of CDs and no-name blank media. A review copy of Delta Force: Land Warrior, for instance, was rejected by the recalcitrant Acer CD-RW drive, as was the latest build of Black and White.

The design of the Acer CRW8432IA drive is dangerously reminiscent of the Asus CRW-0804F, reviewed on the facing page. However, unlike the Asus drive, the front bezel on our Acer review model was loose and the drive's metal chassis felt flimsy. The unit is a seedy, off-yellow colour that looks incongruous with snappy looking grey-beige PCs.

Although the drive includes a small booklet describing the use of the Adaptec software, it fails to include a proper manual. In its place, Acer has included a leaflet, which provides rudimentary instructions on how to install the drive. A more detailed manual and FAQ can be found on the CD. The CD also contains Adaptec EasyCD Creator and Adaptec Direct CD, which performed as expected.

Another surprise was the lack of an extra IDE cable. While many people will have a spare IDE cable anyway, it does make an extra trip to the local computer store a necessity for most. Although not overly expensive to buy, the absence of an IDE cable does reek of a desperate and crass attempt to cut costs. Ultimately, the Acer CRW8432IA represents old technology, and the comparatively low price is no consolation for the piss-poor performance and unashamedly shabby build quality.

HP
CD-WRITER 9140I

DISTRIBUTOR	HP Australia
PRICE	$399
URL	www.hp.com.au

The 9140I is rated in the typical and unexciting budget configuration of 8x CD-R, 4x CD-RW and 32x CDRom. With a mere 2Mb of Buffer memory, and the complete absence of BurnProof or similar technologies, Buffer Underruns remain a distinct possibility. Based on the ancient Sony CR-XI40E mechanism, performance was erratic to say the least. In the PCPowerplay CDTach tests, the 9140i hovered near the top of the group for read speeds, but then plummeted to the bottom for CD-R writing. CD-RW performance saw it placed around the middle. Another caveat: although the 9140I will read 700Mb CD-R discs (80 minute) properly, it isn't able to write to any more than the initial 650Mb (74mins).

To make matters worse, the 9140i omits important features such as an internal SPDIF output, CD-Text support and a noteworthy software package. Although the box claims that MusicMatch Jukebox is included, HP has instead bundled a bastardised 'Trial' version, which lacks many important features. Mp3s, for instance, can only be encoded at a maximum 96kbps bitrate. The manual is, unsurprisingly, non-existent. In place, HP have included a leaflet and a rather useless installation poster. Perhaps most indicative of HP's niggardly sales philosophy is the lone blank disc provided with the drive.

True to HP form, the build quality is well - excellent, with a silver front fascia and purple open/close button. This is a bold step that will surely appeal to HP Brio owners, but may irritate aesthetically conscious owners of beige/cream PCs.

At a considerably higher price than its rivals, and lacking some of the extras, the HP CD-Writer 9140I doesn't really cut the mustard. For example, the price of $399 puts it in the same league as the Aopen and Ricoh offerings, both of which showed far superior performance overall.

LG
CED-8080B

DISTRIBUTOR	FAT Computers
PRICE	$240
URL	www.fatcomputers.com.au

In the past year, LG Electronics (aka Goldstar) has leapfrogged the competition to move into the second position in the CD-RW arena with a massive 17% market share. Of note, Dell has begun equipping their package PCs with rebadged LG drives, which is a good indication of LG's reputation within the larger industry. Only Hewlett-Packard, which has a commanding 20% of the CD-RW market, sells more drives. LG's most popular drive is the CED-8080B, which is an entry-level unit rated at the common standard of 8x CD-R, 4x CD-RW and 32X CD-ROM.

Even at 8x, the drive was the quietest unit we tested, and had a solid feel. Performance was excellent compared to the other 8/4/32 drives we tested, offering the best DAE and CD-R burning speeds. CD-RW writing speed was competent, if not amazing. Importantly, CPU utilisation was refreshingly low. For an entry-level drive, the CED-8080B was remarkably reliable: despite the small 2Mb buffer, we were able to multi-task considerably before the finally drive spat out a coaster. The drive worked equally well using both certified and 'no-name' Taiwanese media.

Adaptec's Easy CD Creator and Direct CD handle all mastering and packet writing tasks. The box also contains a sizeable manual, complete with detailed instructions and general CD-RW information. An ATAPI driver disk is a useful extra, especially if you still play older DOS-based CD-ROM games. As expected, the drive carries the industry standard 1-year full warranty.

This is a well engineered, no-frills drive, which will deftly handle most basic tasks thrown at it. If you are on a budget, and unprepared to compromise quality, the LG CED-8080B comes highly recommended. At $240, the LG drive is a deal. It's a steal. It's sale of the flippin' century.

POWER		
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CD BURNER LIST

	WRITE	REWRITE	READ	CACHE	BURNPROOF	CD-TEXT	BLANK MEDIA
HP CD-WRITER 9140I	8	4	32	2Mb	No	No	1 x CD-R
HP CD-WRITER 9500I	12	8	32	4Mb	No	No	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
YAMAHA CRW2100E	16	10	40	8Mb	No	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
AOPEN CRW-1232	12	10	32	4Mb	No	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
ASUS CRW-0804F	8	4	32	2Mb	No	No	10 x CD-R, 2 x CD-RW
IOMEGA ZIPCD	12	10	32	2Mb	Yes	Yes	2 x CD-R
ACER CRW8432IA	8	4	32	2Mb	No	No	1 x CD-RW
LG CED-8080B	8	4	32	2Mb	No	No	None
RICOH MP7120A	12	10	32	4Mb	No	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
RICOH MP9120A	12	10	32	2Mb	Yes	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
COMPRO CDRW-7586	8	4	32	2Mb	No	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW
CREATIVE 121032	12	10	32	2Mb	Yes	Yes	1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW

YAMAHA CRW2100E

Burning at 16x, the Yamaha is by far the most powerful drive featured in the PCPowerplay Powertest. Other exciting and fresh features include a whopping 8MB buffer and proper 40x DAE. Mp3 buffs will love being able to rip an entire CD to .WAV in mere minutes.

16 10 40

PC PowerPlay POWER AWARD

YAMAHA CRW2100E

Once again, the Yamaha streaks home, with the most impressive, rounded package on the market. A solid software package, impeccable build quality and widespread compatibility back up the awesome performance and credible pricing. Until we get our mitts on the Plextor 16x, the Yamaha CRW 2100E is the Editor's pick for the Gold Award.

CD BURNER LIST

	SOFTWARE	PRICE	DISTRIBUTOR	PHONE	URL
HP CD-WRITER 9140I	Adaptec DirectCD, HP Simple Backup, HP CD Labeler, Acid Xpress	$399	HP Australia	132 347	www.hp.com.au
HP CD-WRITER 9500I	Adaptec DirectCD, Corel Print Office 2000 HP Music Jukebox	$599	HP Australia	132 347	www.hp.com.au
YAMAHA CRW2100E	Adaptec EasyCD, DirectCD, TakeTwo	$599	Yamaha Australia	1800 682 705	www.yamaha.co.jp/english
AOPEN CRW-1232	Nero 5.0, Gamut2000, Norton Ghost	$399	FAT Computers	02 9876 2425	www.fatcomputers.com
ASUS CRW-0804F	Nero 5.0	$310	Achieva	02 9742 3288	www.achieva.com.au
IOMEGA ZIPCD	Adaptec EasyCD, DirectCD, Quik Sync 2, Adobe Activeshare	$649	IOMEGA Australi	1800 466 342	www.iomega.com.au
ACER CRW8432IA	Adaptec EasyCD, DirectCD	$235	EYO Technologies	02 9822 2550	www.eyo.com.au
LG CED-8080B	Adaptec EasyCD, DirectCD	$240	FAT Computers	02 9876 2425	www.fatcomputers.com
RICOH MP7120A	Nero 5.0	$412	Aus PC Market	02 9817 8933	www.auspcmarket.com.au
RICOH MP9120A	Nero 5.0	$588	Aus PC Market	02 9817 8933	www.auspcmarket.com.au
COMPRO CDRW-7586	Adaptec EasyCD, DirectCD, MusicMatch Jukebox, FlipAlbum	$330	Aus PC Market	02 981709833	www.auspcmarket.com.au
CREATIVE 121032	Nero 5.0, Prassi abCD, Creative Lava, FlipAlbum	$599	Creative Australia	02 9316 0550	www.australia.creative.com

AOPEN CRW-1232

At only $399, the CRW-1232 is the cheapest 12x burner available. It's a well rounded package, with a solid software line-up. Although there are excellent cheaper burners, like the LG drive, there is a definite appeal in burning an entire CD in under 6 minutes. There is no excuse not to own a CD-Burner.

Hotware Reviews

FAN-*TASTIC!*

TAKING NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS AWFUL PUN, **ANTHONY FORDHAM** EXAMINES THE LATEST REVOLUTION IN PC COOLING. SORRY.

The modern CPU is a hot and steamy little beast. In the middle of a Quake3 frenzy, even with a GeForce2 Ultra handling most of the visuals, an Athlon or PIII can run up a temperature approaching the boiling point of water. That's 100 degrees Centigrade, by the way. Obviously, these extreme temperatures are very damaging to delicate silicon componentry, so every processor - from the humble Duron to the mighty power-sucking Pentium4 - needs cooling.

For the insane, there's the Senfu water cooler, reviewed opposite. But most people stick with the humble fan. Included in all packaged computer systems and thrown in for free in many online CPU purchases, the fan is simply mounted on the CPU using a standardised clip, and then plugged into a power socket on the motherboard.

Choosing the right fan can dramatically improve a system's stability, reliability and it can do wonders for overclocking. Most fans provided with PC packages are adequate for the supplied processor, but when it comes time for upgrading, problems can occur. A powerful fan

will help create a more versatile CPU. Why pay for a 1GHz Athlon when, with a Kanie Hedgehog fan you can run a Duron 850 at 993MHz?

The fan is also one of the simplest components to install. No messy BIOS or IRQ configuration is required. Examination of a nude processor will reveal a tiny metallic square in the centre of the PCB. This the processor itself. The P4 is quite large, but Celerons, PIIIs, Durons and Athlons are very small. Take a tube of silicon thermal paste (available at all good electronics stores) and cover this metallic square in a thin layer. Make sure it is spread evenly, as the thermal paste prevents temperature irregularities and hotspots. Then, with the CPU mounted on the motherboard, place the fan over the CPU and secure it using the supplied clip. Plug the power wire into either of two sockets on the motherboard, and boot up. The fan will start to rotate, the CPU will be cooled, mission accomplished.

Here then are three high-performance fans rated on an overclocked Duron 850MHz running at 993MHz on an ASUS A7V133 motherboard.

ARCTIC SILVER II

We mentioned thermal paste, and this is the stuff to use. Arctic Silver is made from 99% pure micronised silver, and will lower CPU temperatures by 2 to 7 degrees, depending on whether you bought the Hedgehog fan or not. Classy and functional.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR	Aus PC Market
PRICE	$16.50
URL	www.auspcmarket.com.au

GLOBAL WIN FOP38

A 12V two-ball-bearing 6800rpm fan mounted on an aluminium heatsink, the Global Win ran our Duron at 42 degrees, putting it in the middle of the field. However, the Global Win is a very light unit and not too noisy, so there are no concerns about its potential for damaging the motherboard or CPU if handled awkwardly. One interesting aspect of this fan was an included adaptor to allow it to be plugged directly into the PC power supply instead of on to the motherboard. This allows for better power management for those systems with five SCSI devices and a full compliment of IDE drives, and leaves the motherboard power sockets free for additional case fans. The clip, though, is extraordinarily stiff, resulting in a sort of 'sword-from-the-stone' scenario in the PCPP Bunker, with everyone taking turns to have their fingers sliced by this diabolical thing.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR	EYO Technologies
PRICE	$48
URL	www.eyo.com.au

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THERMALTAKE SUPERORB

A revolutionary design (sorry again) has two 5500rpm fans inside a cylindrical heatsink, moving 22 cubic feet of air per minute. An ingenious clip makes this fan the easiest of the three to install, requiring no use of force and thus minimising potential CPU damage. Because there are two fans, the SuperOrb uses two motherboard power sockets, leaving no room for the rear case fan. Fortunately though, an adaptor is included to plug the SuperOrb directly into the power supply. This fan lags behind the opposition, keeping our Duron at a sweltering 46 degrees, significantly hotter than both the other fans on offer. While this fan is the quietest of the pack, the size could be of some concern; at 74mm tall it can get in the way of large rear-mounted fans, tangled IDE and SCSI cables and even power leads.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR	Aus PC Market
PRICE	$49
URL	www.auspcmarket.com.au

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KANIE HEDGEHOG 238M

What a beast! The Hedgehog's claim to fame is its 60x60x60mm copper heatsink, weighing in at a staggering 445 grams. Atop this, a 6800rpm sleeved fan carries heat from the copper, plugging directly into a motherboard fan power socket. A supple and cleverly designed clip makes installation a breeze. However, the Hedgehog requires assembly; the fan does not come mounted on the heatsink. Unfortunately, the screws don't quite seem to fit, and there are several metal sleeves whose purpose is not entirely clear. The Hedgehog ran our overclocked Duron at 40 degrees, making it king of the hill, although the fan was incredibly noisy owing to the lack of ball-bearings in the sleeve design. And the weight of the Hedgehog is also a concern. Unless it is handled correctly, there is a lot of potential to damage the CPU or even crack the motherboard, especially during installation. However, for serious overclockers, this is the fan to get.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR	Cool PC
PRICE	$84
URL	www.coolpc.com.au

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SENFU
CPU WATER COOLER

DISTRIBUTOR	CoolPC	PRICE	$215	URL	www.coolpc.com.au

Upon receipt of the three boxes that made up this water cooling package, we here in the PCPP Tech Bunker realised this was the big league. This was full-on wirehead scary town. The boxes for the Senfu water cooler have no English printed on them whatsoever. The 'instructions' - and we use the term loosely - are photocopied on two single sheets of A4. Laying out all the bits, it looks like a surgical kit for a backyard live organ donation clinic. People without experience in building and overclocking PCs need not apply.

Before we go any further, DO NOT USE THIS COOLER. Unless you are supremely confident in your abilities not only as a PC builder, but also as a plumber, it's not worth it. The Senfu cooler has the ability to instantly destroy a $3000 PC with one squirt from its pipe. Thread-sealing tape is your friend. Use it. Use three or four rolls of it. Pick it up from the local K-Mart and don't put it down again until you are sure - surer than sure - there are no leaks, seepages or damp patches. You have been warned.

The Nature of the Beast
Basically, the Senfu cooler works by pumping cold water through a radiator attached to the processor like an ordinary fan. It can be attached to both Slot and Socket style processors, although a large amount of modification is required for Slot CPUs.

Two pipes are attached to the radiator, obviously one in and one out. The in pipe runs from an enormous evaporative cooler, and the out pipe runs back to a water reservoir. The reservoir - a four litre (minimum) container of tap water - contains the submerged pump, which is much like a cheap aquarium pump, and indeed if you don't like

the Senfu pump (for reasons which will become apparent), a fishtank pump will work just as well.

Setup seems simplicity itself. With the supplied piping, run a pipe from the outflow of the pump to the evaporative cooler. Run a pipe from the cooler to the radiator. Finish with a pipe from the radiator back to the reservoir. Mount the radiator on the CPU with the easy-to-use clip. Plug the evaporative cooler into the power supply. Voila! Instant water cooling.

Unfortunately, the practicalities of combining tap water with sensitive electronic equipment turn a simple setup into a Tech Editor's nightmare. For a start, the pipes are not pre-cut. The pack contains one long pipe, which the user must slice up into three pipes of appropriate length. The metal valve for the pump which fits the pipe, doesn't fit the pump. We had to wrap the outflow valve in nearly a metre of thread-sealing tape, then force the metal valve on, then wrap the whole thing with another metre of tape.

Also, rather alarmingly, the power for the pump runs straight out of the wall into the part of the pump that needs to be submerged. This means 240 volts of killer electricity is running straight into four litres of water.

Fortunately, if there is a short, the resultant power surge will blow every fuse in the house, but this is scant comfort if your hand is in the water tank at the time.

Flaming Electric Death
Advice for beginners: run the cooler for an hour or so before putting it anywhere near your PC. For a start, the evaporative cooler leaks. A crisscrossing network of pipes delivers water to the radiator, and these pipes are connected with U-shaped bends on either end of the cooler. The first time we powered up the Senfu system, water started squirting out of both ends of the evaporator. A few more metres of thread-sealing tape later, and the system was leak-free.

Eventually we were confident the cooler wasn't about to widdle on the motherboard, so we attached the radiator to a Duron 850 running on ASUS' excellent A7V133. Immediate results weren't spectacular, but long term use - running the processor at 1003MHz by tweaking the Front Side Bus to 118Mhz - saw the processor unwavering from 39 degrees. Not too amazing, true, but the principal advantage of the Senfu is that all heat is carried out of the case, rather than being dissipated across all other components. So while cooling advantages aren't realised in the first 20 minutes of use, once the PC has been running for a couple of hours, motherboard and case temperatures are three to four degrees cooler than the fan/heatsink norm. This of course creates added stablitiy, and the PC will run solid as a rock.

Or at least, it remains solid until the outflow pump pops out of the reservoir and squirts five litres of water all over the CD-ROM drive and floppy. Then people in the office start calling your name with increasing urgency, and you'll have to get an extra pack of paper towels from the cleaning cupboard.

Is the Senfu water cooler worth all the pain, fiddling, wet patches and terrible risk? Considering we didn't even think about trying to run this system in a case - everything was laid out on the bench - the answer has to be no, unless you are indeed a plumber. Or mad. It will cool your CPU and allow stable overclocking, but extended use almost guarantees leaks. For only the hardest of the hard kore.

Anthony Fordham

PIONEER
ATHLON 1GHZ GAMES PC

| DISTRIBUTOR | Pioneer Computers 02 9690 2888 | PRICE | $2799 | URL | www.pioneercomputers.com.au |

Most so-called games PCs are inexpertly designed by big corporations looking for a balance between price and performance. Unfortunately, this balance tends toward the wrong sort of performance; cutting down on the graphics card to leave more design budget for the plastic on the front, or for an Encarta 2001 software package. So it's welcome relief to see a competent, high-powered gaming solution come from a medium-sized Australian company like Pioneer.

Not to be confused with Pioneer Electronics, Pioneer Computing is a systems integrator based in Sydney. For this PC, Pioneer has chosen to go with an Athlon 1Ghz CPU, an eminently sensible decision, since this processor is not only relatively cheap, but also very powerful. By choosing an Athlon rather than a Pentium 4, Pioneer have kept system performance at a high while saving thousands.

This is also the first games PC we have seen that offers 256Mb of PC-133 RAM. As we've said many times before, once you go to 256Mb, you can never go back. The system boots faster, starts applications faster, and the user will rarely experience that famous Windows slowdown.

Window to your soul
And speaking of Windows, Pioneer has chosen Windows 98SE, understanding all too well that Windows ME is a horrible mess for gamers, especially with the performance hit associated with System Protection. With an Athlon in charge and 256Mb of RAM doing the numbers, Windows is almost tolerable as an operating system.

The processor and memory ride on an MSI KT7 Pro. This motherboard is very similar to the highly rated KT7 Turbo in last month's Power Test, except that it uses the older KT133 chipset rather than the KT133A. Boasting a very

respectable 6 PCI slots, there's plenty of scope for expansion in this PC, although Pioneer doesn't include the backplate for the second set of USB ports supported by the board.

Video is handled by a 32Mb Creative 3D Blaster GeForce2 GTS. While modest compared to the Hercules Prophet II Ultra, the 3D Blaster is much more powerful than a MX card, and is a massive improvement over the TNT2 M64 cards offered in many other 'performance' PCs. Being a brand name card, drivers are shipped with the PC and the various warranties offered by Creative apply.

Like so many other systems integrators, Pioneer has used the Soundblaster Live! Value to handle audio. Less impressive are the Creative Millennium Edition Cambridge Soundworks FourPoint Surround Speakers (phew). It's not that these speakers sound bad, they sound great. It's not that we don't appreciate 4-point surround, we do. It's that for some reason Cambridge or Creative, we don't know who, has decided to give these speakers the tackiest silver finish you will ever see. Truly ugly, but thankfully small enough to hide.

Storage is amply provided in an IBM Deskstar 30Gb 7200rpm Hard Drive. This is an excellent component. Pioneer didn't partition it though, so Windows kindly chews about three gigabytes just to annoy. Another nice addition to the machine is a 16x DVD from Pioneer. This is the drive PCPP uses in the Beast, and coupled with the included WinDVD2000 software DVD player, movies run without stutter or slowdown at even the highest resolutions.

Visually, for great justice
The monitor though, can make or break a PC package, and it is very pleasing to see Pioneer include the excellent - and cheap - Hitachi CM615. Capable of a very respectable 1280x1204 @ 75Hz, this 17" monitor is clear, bright and doesn't take up much desk real estate. It's not a flat screen, but the fishbowl shape is not very pronounced, and after a few hours appreciation of the colour reproduction, the curves are barely noticeable. Inclusion of this component was an excellent decision on Pioneer's part. Running the PC through a rigourous set of tests, Pioneer's offering managed a respectable 4423 in 3DMark 2000 and a chunky 56FPS in Quake3, both tests at 1280x 1024x32.

SAVAGELY BURNED

Okay, so Pioneer hasn't included a CD burner with this machine, and you're thinking that should cost at least ten points. We think though, at less than $3000, this system will leave you plenty of change to go out and get a chunky 16x burner later. This is a gaming PC after all, the focus is on graphical and processing grunt. A lower cost now means you can get playing sooner, until that bruised and battered bank account can recharge enough to afford the fabulous Yamaha CRW2100E-VK. Oh yeah.

SYSTEM SPECS

- **PROCESSOR** AMD Athlon 1GHz
- **RAM** 256Mb PC-133
- **MOTHERBOARD** MSI KT7 Pro, KT133 chipset
- **VIDEO** Creative 3D Blaster 32Mb GF2 GTS
- **OPTICAL** 16x Pioneer DVD-ROM
- **STORAGE** IBM Deskstar 7200rpm 30Gb HDD
- **MODEM** None!
- **MONITOR** Hitachi CM615 17" 1280x1024 @ 75Hz
- **EXPANSION** 6x PCI, 1x AGP, 1x CNR, 2x front USB, 2x rear USB (backplate not included), 2x serial, 1x parallel

But then the horror. For some weird unknowable and really disturbing reason, Pioneer hasn't included a modem with this PC. This HAS to be an oversight. When you order your Games PC, demand a modem to be thrown in for the price. What on earth were they thinking? Did they just forget? Surely not. This has to be a mistake. Please.

Apart from this bizarre oversight, it's difficult to find too much else wrong with this package. At $2799 it's significantly cheaper than anything of a similar specification offered by the big boys, and Pioneer are more than happy to change whatever components you don't like. Being a systems integrator instead of an enormous transnational corporation, Pioneer is better able to bring you a gaming solution tailored exactly to your every niggling need. Give them a call. If they throw in a modem, you're unlikely to be disappointed.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

An excellent system built with attention to detail... mostly. Where the hell is the modem?

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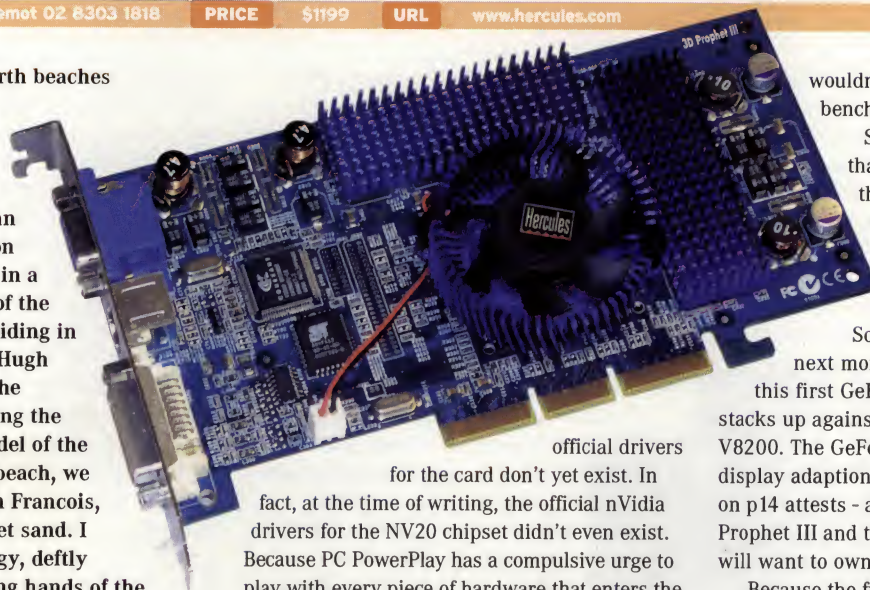
HERCULES
3D PROPHET III

| DISTRIBUTOR | Guillemot 02 8303 1818 | PRICE | $1199 | URL | www.hercules.com |

Midnight. The north beaches of Sydney.
The Pacific is huge, black, implacable. The Product Manager of Guillemot Australia, Jean Francois Galle, stands on the foreshore, hunched in a heavy coat, unmindful of the two camouflaged men hiding in the dunes behind him. Hugh and I are ready. When the Guillemot Zodiac carrying the first pre-production model of the 3D Prophet III hits the beach, we leap. Hugh goes for Jean Francois, tackling him into the wet sand. I head for the rubber dingy, deftly sidestepping the grasping hands of the French commandos guarding the package. I grab the package. I head off into the dunes, abandoning Hugh to his fate. I don't care. I have the first GeForce3 card in Australia.

Unfortunately at this stage there's not a hell of a lot we can do with it, because Hercules' official drivers for the card don't yet exist. In fact, at the time of writing, the official nVidia drivers for the NV20 chipset didn't even exist. Because PC PowerPlay has a compulsive urge to play with every piece of hardware that enters the bunker, no matter prototypical it is, we actually found some unofficial Detonator Series 10 drivers on the net, so we had a play with those.

The results were very interesting, but since these drivers aren't official and don't reflect the real-world performance of the card, we feel it wouldn't be fair or politic to publish benchmarks based on these drivers. So we just wanted to tell you that the 3D Prophet III exists, and that we have had the card in one of our test machines for the last week, and we've been doing all kinds of cruel and unnatural things to it.

So watch this space closely for next month's exhaustive benchmark of this first GeForce3 card, and see how it stacks up against ASUS' own GeForce3, the V8200. The GeForce3 is clearly the future of display adaption - as Hugh's spotlight feature on p14 attests - and we're confident the 3D Prophet III and the ASUS V8200 are cards you will want to own. Stay tuned.

Because the future is now.

Anthony Fordham

> **PCPP**
> Watch this space for the videocard of the year. The 3D Prophet III has the potential to be very scary indeed
> **TBA**

EVERGLIDE
GIGANTA MOUSEPAD

| DISTRIBUTOR | Aus PC Market | PRICE | $35 | URL | www.auspcmarket.com.au |

The humble mousepad is one of the most overlooked peripherals, especially since the mouse (and hence, mousepad) is the most frequently used part of any computer system. And yet, people are quite content to use a poorly performing pad. Indeed, most of us are quite happy plonking down in excess of $70 for a new Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer, but when it comes to the mousepad, we opt for something free. People generally dismiss high-performance mousepads as a frivolous irrelevancy.

While most mouse pads are constructed using cloth on a flimsy rubber backing, or even worse, plastic, the Everglide Giganta is fashioned from a huge slab of Polyurethane - even the angriest, most determined Quake nutter will find it hard to damage. The board is secured to the table with 5 transparent rubber traction pads, which provide excellent grip even on smooth, polished tables. Designed exclusively for gamers, the textured surface of the Everglide Giganta provides excellent tracking and the perfect amount of tactile friction. It also works admirably for navigating the Windows desktop.

The pad works equally well when using either a ball-mouse like the Razer Boomslang, or the newer breed of optical mice. In addition, the hard epoxy surface of the Giganta essentially eliminates all the detritus that builds up within the innards of your mouse - after several weeks of testing, my mouse remained miraculously free of gunk and lint. On top of this, the Everglide Giganta is fully washable and dishwasher safe!

The Giganta is available in a variety of different colours, with several fully licensed themes to choose from. If you're keen to show your allegiance at LAN parties, pads are available with a Quake 3 Arena, Red Alert 2, Tribes 2, Half-Life or a Razer Boomslang logo emblazoned across the surface.

We can't promise that the Everglide will tangibly improve your Quake scores, but it certainly feels good. At $35, the Everglide Giganta is much more expensive than the $2 Harvey Norman special. Nevertheless, if you are fed up with your scungey, Looney tunes mousepad, the Everglide Giganta is definitely worth considering. Next month, look out for our mouse pad Power Test, where we test 15 different mouse pads in a no holds barred deathmatch extravaganza! (*We swear to God he's joking - Ed*)

Hugh Norton-Smith

> **PCPP**
> A real quality-of-life improvement for hardcore gamers and precision computer users. Takes the pain out of pointing
> **86**

YAMAHA
TSS-1 SPEAKER SYSTEM

| DISTRIBUTOR | Yamaha Australia | PRICE | $499 | URL | www.yamaha.com.au |

Last month PCPP established that serious gamers need serious speakers. For those unwilling to pay close to $1500 for the excellent Boston Digital Theater 6000, this 5.1 channel solution from Yamaha is a worthy alternative.

The TSS-1 consists of seven separate components: five speakers, a sub-woofer and a column with volume, source-select and various other controls. As with the Boston setup, the subwoofer goes under the desk in a corner of the room, the centre channel goes atop the monitor, the left and right forward speakers on either side, while the two rear speakers are most conveniently placed face-up on the floor behind the listening position. Or they can be mounted on the wall with the included brackets.

Yamaha has provided a very complete package. The cables are more than long enough for most medium-sized rooms, and two digital cables are included, a coax and an optical. The main design advantage the TSS-1 shows over the Boston DT6000 is that the six speakers all connect into the control column, and all inputs are on the column itself. This means the sub-woofer can be positioned correctly in the corner of the room, and doesn't need to be close to the digital source.

Of course, this is a much cheaper system than the DT6000 so sound quality doesn't really compare. The TSS-1 is plenty loud enough, with 6W satellites and an 18W sub-woofer, but it lacks the real stomach-churning, ribcage-cracking intensity of the Boston speakers at higher volumes. And although the TSS-1 can produce bass all the way down to 40Hz - over the DT6000's 50Hz - the physically smaller speakers mean this bass advantage is completely lost.

Also, the TSS-1 doesn't include any standard RCA stereo inputs. The analog inputs are two stereo 1/8th inch plugs for PC soundcard generated surround effects. This severely limits the TSS-1's uses for other Hi-Fi components such as a TV or DVD player. If the other devices don't have digital-out, they are restricted to the single, stereo 1/8th inch plug, which really doesn't cut the mustard for high-performance audio.

The Yamaha TSS-1 is clearly designed for PC use only. And for this price, performance is admirable. If personal taste or local building ordinance requires a modest but still quality audio setup, then the TSS-1 is a sensible choice.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Lack of inputs means this system is PC-only, but excellent performance and low cost make the TSS-1 worthwhile **85**

ASUS
V7100 MX DELUXE COMBO

| DISTRIBUTOR | Achieva 02 9742 3288 | PRICE | $399 | URL | www.achieva.com.au |

In PCPP#58 we tested 15 of the latest video accelerator cards. Scoring very well in performance and features was the V7100 MX with TwinView Architecture, coming in behind only the excellent Hercules 3D Prophet II MX.

A close cousin to the TwinView V7100 is this Deluxe Combo board, also with TwinView architecture, and the same graphics chip with a host of extra features. TwinView architecture allows simultaneous and independent dual-display on Windows ME and 98. This allows users to surf the web while watching a movie or playing 3D games on a big TV screen.

The card offers antenna/cable TV input from coax RF and output to TV, digital flat panel, VCR or a projector connected to the video card. Included is a set of ASUS VR 3D Glasses allowing gamers to play games in amazing 3D. It's surprising the amount of games that are already 3D enabled, although some do it better than others. To use this mode the monitor being used must support a refresh rate of 100Hz or higher. The glasses are very easy to set up, however, they tend to cause headaches after extended use.

VideoSecurity software can turn any computer into a home security system and will detect environment changes, capture unusual conditions and even take a snapshot and email it to a user-defined address or make a warning phone call. Cameras for video input aren't included.

The ASUS Digital VCR software creates a virtual onscreen VCR that can play movies, schedule recording, browse all channels simultaneously and capture TV programs or video with Full-D1 compression (30fps 704x480). Video input can also come from a Camcorder and the included Ulead VideoStudio software allows capturing and editing of home movies in MPEG2 format. After editing, the video can be output to VCR.

DVD playback software will play DVD movies from the computer's DVD-ROM drive and output the picture to either the computer's monitor or a TV. All cables are included to accommodate almost any cable configuration.

Installation and software configuration is simple and we encountered no difficulties setting up this card. To show off the card's performance and experience games in 3D a full working version of Soldier of Fortune is included.

Built on the Asus V7100 MX, the ASUS V7100 Deluxe is the second fastest GF2 MX card we have encountered, and the host of extra features make this package excellent value.

David Petersen

PCPP

Packed with enough extras to drown a hippo, the V7100 Deluxe offers excellent value and impressive performance **81**

GUILLEMOT
MAXI STUDIO ISIS

| DISTRIBUTOR | Sound & Music 03 9528 5744 | PRICE | $599 | URL | www.guillemot.com |

So you want to be a Rock Superstar? Well, the Guillemot ISIS may be the first fateful step on your long and winding journey to international recognition and an expensive coke habit… this is a card for semi-professional Music Production. Capitals Added for Emphasis. Think of the ISIS as a supercharged Gametheater XP for aspiring producers. It's an older unit, first released in 1999, but it's testament to Guillemot's design philosophy and a lack of realistic competition that the card still performs well today.

The ISIS consists of a main board with the standard Line Out/Line In/Microphone sockets, a daughterboard with a PCI connector, and a very cool break-out box called the rack. The main board connects to the daughterboard, which then connects to the rack using a fat PCI cable just like the Gametheater. A RISC-based chip called the Dream handles the mixing and effects processing magic, as well as all of the wave-table synthesis. The synthesis engine is capable of 64-voice polyphony using the on-board 4Mbs of Roland patches. This memory can be expanded to a maximum of 36Mb. Unfortunately, the card only takes SDRAM SIMMs, which can be rather difficult to find these days.

Totally stacked rack
The external half-rack-unit sized box has an astounding array of holes in which to plug audio gear. Along with the usual MIDI IN/THRU/OUT ports, Guillemot has included a massive eight line-level inputs and four line-level outputs. You know that black Kirk Hammet-style axe you bought in your adolescent rebellion phase? Plug it straight in. Want to record Heart & Soul with a bossanova using your Aunt Jemima's cheesy eighties Casio keyboard? No problem. Furthermore, the ISIS allows recording using all inputs and outputs simultaneously, so previously recorded material can be monitored as new tracks are lain down.

In addition to all of the analogue I/O options, the rack provides both coax and optical digital connections. With the right cable, tunes can be dumped digitally to minidisc or DAT recorder. And if you find yourself needing more real-time effects, the industry-standard S/PDIF Coax connections are a great way to avoid unnecessary D/A and A/D conversions when using an external processor.

Installation proved to be painless - Guillemot even includes a attractive full-colour Quick Install card that guides you through the procedure. We simply inserted the main card, plugged in the daughterboard and powered up the machine. Windows 98 then detected the card faultlessly, prompted for the Driver CD and did its funky

thing. The install procedure even automatically set up the requisite DOS drivers, so the ISIS fully supports all games - although without 3D positioning. Another nice touch was the length of the provided PCI cable - it's nearly two metres long! It'll easily reach from under the desk to wherever the sexy black metal rack is posed.

The software included with the ISIS is nothing less than exceptional. The bundle includes Acid DJ, and special versions of both Cool Edit Pro and Logic Audio. Acid DJ is a loop-based music production system. With an elegant drag and drop interface, it's extremely easy to get started on that Ambient/Trance masterpiece. Then there's the ISIS specific application, Console8/4, which allows configuration of the audio signal routing on the card. Wave files can be converted to MIDI-playable patches for the on-board wave-table synth using Instrument Manager and combined into banks using the Soundbank Manager. So, while more flexibility

SYSTEM SPECS

■ MAIN BOARD

DREAM DSP Engine
64-Voice Wave Table Synthesizer
Soundblaster Compatibility
Microphone In/Line In/Speaker Out
4MB Patch Library

■ EXTERNAL RACK

Eight analog inputs & Four analog outputs
S/PDIF optical & coax connections
MIDI-In / MIDI-Out / MIDI-Thru DIN connectors
20bit/48kHz ADC and DAC converters

may be needed later on, you won't need to shell out for extra software straight away.

All Your Bass are Belong to Us
In the past, Guillemot has arguably been a little slow releasing needed driver bug fixes for its sound cards. But since the ISIS's first release in 1999, there have been many updates containing additional functionality and stability improvements, so the drivers are very reliable. The latest driver release even includes ASIO2 support, so that audio latency will be minuscule, meaning fewer synchronisation problems when using software synthesisers like the fantastic Roland TB303/TR808-inspired Rebirth.

Whilst the ISIS performs admirably for an enthusiast card, its audio fidelity is not quite up to recent, more professional offerings. For instance, the D/A converters on the ISIS have a maximum resolution of 20bits and a maximum sampling frequency of 48kHz, whereas some of the newer recording cards are equipped with 24bit/96kHz capable converters. What does this mean in real terms? Well not too much. You'll be hard-pressed to tell the difference in the average home configuration… there are so many other sources of electrical and ambient noise. The mighty CPU Cooling fan protecting the over-clocked Athlon, for instance. The subtle improvements the higher resolution and frequency provide will be all but lost.

Overall, the ISIS comes highly recommended. For a mere $599, you have a very functional semi-professional audio editing suite. Multi-track audio recording and editing, loop-based music production, sample tweaking and wave-table synthesis are all possible with this package - Moby, Norman Cook and Richard D. James, look out.

Nic Reid

PCPP

Excellent semi-professional package for the enthusiast. Slightly less powerful than expensive professional systems

89

Hotware Reviews

IOMEGA
HIPZIP

DISTRIBUTOR	imoega	PRICE	$649	URL	www.iomega.com

The MP3 player is still an immature technology. The cost of compact flash and other media has seen manufacturers searching for a balance between cost and functionality, and mostly failing to really impress. But the iomega HipZip takes a step in the right direction.

iomega has taken a different tack with this MP3 player, combining the company's well-established zip-disk technology with functionality we expect from a player of this type. The HipZip uses the poor cousin of the zip-disk family, the 40Mb Pocket Zip. It's the poor cousin because unlike the hugely popular 100Mb and 250Mb zip-disks, the Pocket Zip hasn't really taken off, since it has been waiting for an application that truly suits its combination of small size and relatively low cost.

And here it is. 40Mb is an almost perfect size for an MP3 player. Ten or twelve tracks sampled at 128kbps can be easily fitted on each disk. The Pocket Zip is less than twice the size of a fifty cent piece and weighs about the same, so it's a sensible prospect to carry six or seven of them on the road. And they're cheap. Not nearly as cheap as minidisc, still $20 - $25 dollars each, but much more sensible than compact flash.

Unfortunately, abandoning solid-state to lower costs has a considerable effect on the speed of the HipZip. Changing between tracks takes about a second, and with no TOC on the disk, it's not possible to scroll quickly through the tracks; each must be loaded before the player can move on to the next.

The HipZip is also slightly larger than other MP3 players, and it does vibrate when changing tracks or writing data. However, the menus are quite comprehensive, allowing management of play lists, reorganisation of tracks and tweaking of bass and treble. The earphones supplied with the unit are no great shakes, but with some decent head gear, sound quality is more than good enough for jogging and public transport. It's not as cheap as minidisc, but the HipZip is a much more cost-effective unit than other MP3 players. It is slower, but not too much slower, and you'll have a few vital dollars left over for your impending Napster subscription.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP
Larger and slower than other MP3 players, but cheap disks and good sound make the HipZip a worthy contender **73**

KODAK
MC3

DISTRIBUTOR	Kodak Australia 1300 130 674	PRICE	$499	URL	www.kodak.com.au/US/en/digital/cameras/mc3

Like the execrable Samsung DigiMax , the mc3 is a combination digital camera and MP3 player. Examination of the colourful - almost garish - box reveals the mc3 is cleary aimed at the funky, clubby, my-interests-include-socialising-and-going-to-the-movies-with-friends demographic. This is indicated by a zany lass in a beanie and a dude on rollerblades in the process of grabbing some very tough and serious air.

Tunes, pics, vids, all in one machine. Given the paucity of memory though, its only really practicable to do one thing at a time. Day one: take 110 fairly ordinary digital pics. Day two, shoot 1'25" of 'quality' video or 5'20" of 'good' video. Day three, listen to 15 minutes of MP3s at a reasonable bitrate.

Photography isn't spectacular because the lens is only modest. And there is no flash, limiting the mc3's usefulness as a clubbing accessory. Disassembly of the unit reveals the lens to be a solid-state component soldered directly to the main PCB. It basically looks like something out of a Dick Smith Electronics starter pack. 'Project #23: digital camera. Use lens piece LN231 and solder it to the board next to the 35 ohm resistor..."

To be fair though, video capture works well for late night, staggering uptown work, and thirty seconds is all a hipster needs to film her best friend puking into a policeman's hat. MP3 playback is adequate, although any other MP3 player you can think of does a better job. Use of compact flash as a recording medium means changing tracks is as quick as on a discman.

The mc3 has a teeny little colour LCD screen for composing shots and navigating the rather limited menu. It isn't possible to change picture resolutions or compression ratios - although you can select 24fps or 10fps video - limiting the flexibility of the flash memory. And larger, more useful flash cards are still fantastically expensive.

Yes, the mc3 is an all-in-one solution for the clubber who must have everything. There's also a comprehensive software package included for MP3 ripping, video and picture editing. But at $499 the mc3 is overpriced. For $199.95 this might have made a groovy birthday present for a younger cousin. But for anyone serious about music or photography, products like this are best avoided.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP
Tiny lens, not enough supplied memory, a lack of setup options, and no flash makes the mc3 a poorly realised product **45**

3COM
WIRELESS LAN STARTER PACK

| DISTRIBUTOR | 3Com Australia 1800 644 606 | PRICE | $2899 | URL | www.3com.com |

Deathmatch on the patio. Play Deus Ex while sauteing in the bath. Watch prOn while lying in bed. All of this, folks, is possible. Wireless LAN technology is a data transmission system designed to provide location-independent network access by using radio waves rather than a traditional cable infrastructure. Installing a Wireless LAN (WLAN) eliminates all the hassle of cables or the frustration of drilling holes in your walls…

Wireless LAN technology, very much in its infancy by anyone's estimation, is poised to become mainstream. Industry pundits have suggested the market for these devices, which now exceeds US$600 million, will expand to over US$2.4 billion by early 2004. In recent years, there have been several abortive attempts to develop a powerful, cross platform standard for Wireless LANs. The Infrared Data Association 1.1 standard (IrDA), which is used in palmtop computers, laptops and mobile phones, was virtually stillborn. IrDA range and bandwidth is limited, and even the smallest obstruction renders transmission impossible. Bluetooth, which was championed by Intel right throughout 1999, was another cool wireless networking technology that remains largely vapourware.

Bluetooth is a plan for an inexpensive, low-powered and short-range RF system that would link your PDAs, pagers, mobiles and laptops using a common protocol. Despite the industry hype, the spiralling costs of BlueTooth-enabled devices has seen this promising new technology largely ignored by manufacturers.

Using radio signals in the same frequency as GSM mobile phones, the IEEE 802.11b Wi-Fi standard - essentially a higher-powered version of BlueTooth - looks set to become the first widely accepted wireless networking protocol. Theoretically, any Wi-Fi product should work seamlessly with any other Wi-Fi compliant product, regardless of the vendor. Apple's sexy AirPort, for instance, is compatible with the Wi-Fi standard. Wi-Fi includes built-in 40-bit encryption to protect your network from eavesdroppers, and connects at up to 11Mbps. However, dynamic load balancing adjusts connections speeds on the fly depending on network conditions. If the network is dropping packets, Wi-Fi devices will lower the network speed to either 5.5, 2, or 1Mbps. Generally, the further a client moves away from the broadcast station, the lower the connection speed. Most basic LANs operate at 10Mbps, so the 11Mbps offered by 802.11b compares favourably. Rest assured, as 11Mbps should prove more than sufficient for gaming purposes.

3Com's AirConnect, which leverages 802.11b Wi-Fi technology, is the first wireless LAN product intended for SOHO usage. The Airconnect Starter Kit provides everything you need to set up a rudimentary wireless network: there are three wireless LAN PC cards (PCMCIA for mobile users) and a wireless LAN access point. PCI Wireless LAN cards are available separately. Assuming you have a basic knowledge of network installation, the AirConnect Starter kit is ideal for eliminating the mess of cables snaking across your floor.

The Starter Pack provides a simple way to wirelessly expand your home LAN. If you have an existing network, simply connect the Access Point to an Ethernet hub or wall jack, and clients will be able to easily access the network. The access point has an RJ-45 connector, which allows you to connect via Ethernet. Each access point is designed to accommodate up to 63 separate users, so even a warehouse full of Starcraft-mad Koreans should find it sufficient. And, if users move to

another building, the extended roaming features keep wireless networking effectively seamless. The AirConnect Wireless LAN has a range of roughly 100 metres, although the actual coverage depends on the radio characteristics of the environment where the Access Point is installed. Obviously, placing the Access Point in a prominent, elevated position will improve network performance.

For gaming the possibilities are endless: not only could you play games with other people within your house but, conceivably, a friend from across the road. The AirConnect also functions as a powerful method for sharing an Internet connection, a workgroup printer or other resources. Since you don't have to drill holes in your walls or run cable under the floors, the Airconnect is an easy solution for providing everyone in the geek-haus access to the communal cable modem. Real world performance, while not jaw-dropping, was consistent with 3Com's claims and should provide ample bandwidth for all but the most demanding of corporate environments.
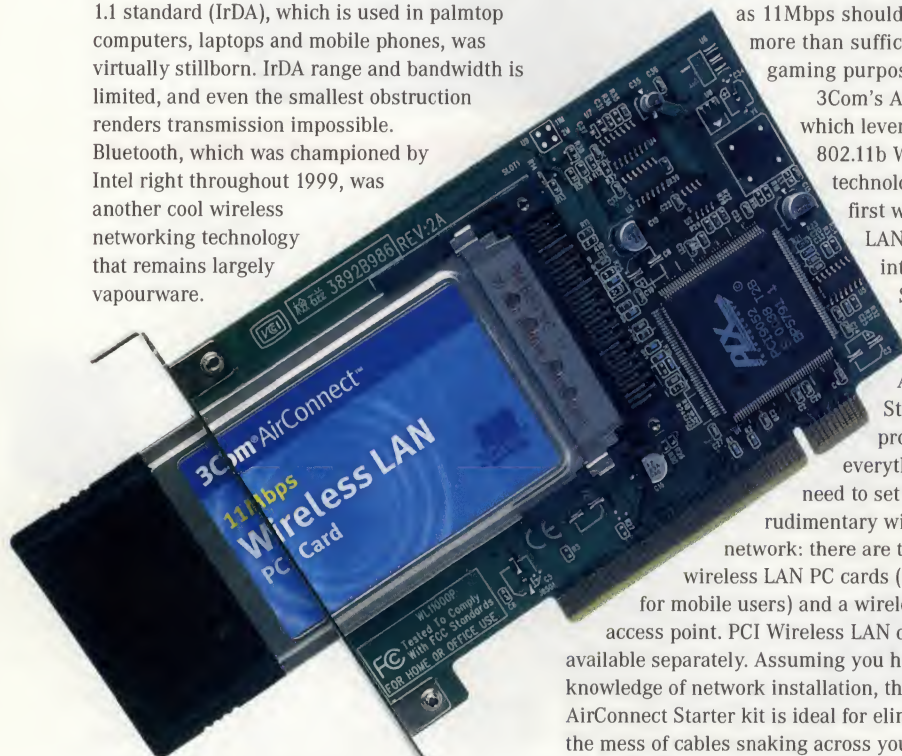
If you're fed up with meters of unsightly cables, or annoyed at having to use your computer in an inconvenient spot purely because that's where your Ethernet or phone jack happens to be located, the 3Com AirConnect is a robust and reliable way to expand your LAN.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

Like most 1.0 technologies, AirConnect has some minor flaws. But it's versatile, powerful, easy to configure and it works!

79

THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

The Beast is the product of years of painstaking research: We have coalesced all the relevant computer knowledge and slashed through all the misinformation and hype to provide you with the definitive high-speed PC. Below are a series of eminently useful recommendations for those of you ready to spend your hard-earned cash on top-notch gear. Bow down, churl.

AMD Athlon 1.33 GHz

DISTRIBUTOR	AMD Australia
PRICE	$649
URL	www.amd.com

This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play Giants on the highest detail setting at 1600 x 1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.

Pioneer 16xDVD ROM & H'ware Decoder

DISTRIBUTOR	Pioneer
PRICE	$549
URL	www.pioneeraus.com.au

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the calm introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's Three Colours: White or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's Braindead, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave… er… movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.

Yamaha CRW2100E-VK

DISTRIBUTOR	Yamaha 1800 682 705
PRICE	$599
URL	www.yamaha.co.jp/english

Yamaha not only manufactures some of the world's fastest motorbikes, but can now lay claim to the fastest CD burner on the market. The CRW2100E writes at 16x, rewrites at 10x and reads at 40x. It's also a formidable Digital Audio Extraction drive, making it perfect for Mp3 buffs. The included Adaptec software package really rounds out the package. No proper system should be without a CD burner.

ASUS A7M266

DISTRIBUTOR	Achieva 02 9742 3288
PRICE	$415
URL	www.asus.com.tw

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate DRAM, the A7M kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here at PCPP. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.
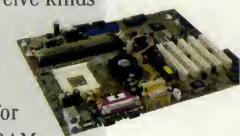
Hercules Gametheater XP

At last the SB Live! has been toppled. The Gametheater sounds just as good, looks ten times better, and has a fat PCI cable to make the Beast look really serious.

The rack also has four USB ports, making it a great multi-purpose hub for joysticks, digital cameras, webcams, racing wheels... hell, anything you could possibly think of. Stylish and functional. What ever will they come up with next?

Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

WARNING: ensure bowel is empty before using this speaker setup. The DT6000 is so powerful it contravenes several building ordinances, and violates no less than four separate paragraphs in the Geneva Convention. Five channel surround, funky remote and optical in make this THE choice for people who can't take the pain from its oughta-be-illegal bigger brother, the DT7000.

LianLi PC-60

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.

256Mb DDR DRAM

Once you go to 256Mb you'll never look back. You'll wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Quake3 at the same time.
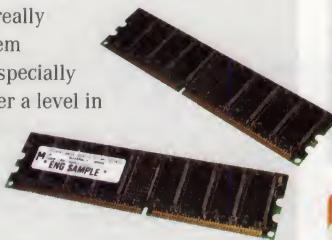
Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

It's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.

Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra

As the PCPP PowerTest attests, the 3D Prophet II Ultra is the fastest card on the market. Priced competitively for an Ultra, it comes with digital and tv-out as well as standard VGA. Excellent overclocking ability, exceptional build quality and funkiest, spunkiest electric blue PCB make this card pick of the bunch.
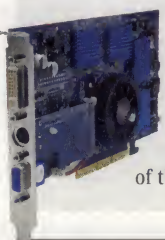
Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.

Sony G500 21" FD Trinitron Monitor

Big is beautiful. Never a truer word was spoke. Sure, you will have to completely redesign your study or gaming room to fit this monster in, but once it's in, you'll wonder how you ever did without it. Magnificent in every way, capable of a staggering 2048 x 1536, crystal clear, anti-reflective and thoroughly good for your soul.

Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.
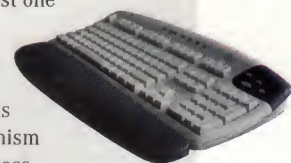
TOTAL BEAST VALUE

$9599

SETUP

SPOUSAL APPROVAL!

Q> My wife has said I can upgrade my computer soon, so I've started looking at which processor to purchase. Can you please tell me what is the difference between an AMD Athlon Thunderbird running at 1GHz and an Intel P-III running at 1GHz. Is there any difference in performance? Would I be able to tell the difference when playing 3D games? And most of all, why is there $600 difference between the two chips?

At time of writing I could get the Athlon for a little over $400, but would be paying over $1000 to have Intel Inside. If there is no difference for games, why would I want to pay $600 for a little Intel badge on the front of my machine?

The Athlon. Great value for money, but apparently delicious to ant lions. You learn something every day!

Also, because of the cheaper price of the AMD chips, I was leaning towards dual processors when they are released. Would there be any benefit (again for games) in running duals under a Win2000 operating system, or should I spend my money on a big present for my wife?

Peter Mah

A> Yes, there's a difference between the Athlon and the P-III at a given clock speed. The Athlon is a bit faster. Enough for you to tell the difference? Probably not. But faster nonetheless. The price difference isn't as big as it might seem, because Athlon motherboards cost a bit more than Intel ones. But the AMD product *is* considerably cheaper than the Intel one.

Dual-CPU Athlon motherboards should be out some time this year, but

there's no reason to get one if your focus is games. The only game I know of that even supports multiprocessing is Quake 3 Arena, and that only gives you about 30% better framerates, depending on your graphics settings.

A present for your wife would indeed be a better idea than a dual-CPU game box. Traditional wife-pacification gifts include, I'm given to understand, sets of golf clubs, power tools, and season tickets to the local nudie bar.

USE A BIGGER HAMMER?

Q> I have an IBM Aptiva model EQ2. My problem is that I recently bought a Voodoo 3 3000 AGP, and it won't fit in the adapter card slot, because there is this thing in the middle of the slot stopping me from putting it in! Is there anything I can do?

Paul Hodgins

A> What you can do is check your computer specs more carefully, next time, before you buy hardware you may not be able to use. My infallible powers of divination (I asked the genie for them third, after the never-ending Tim Tam packet and the Airsoft M134 Vulcan machine gun) tell me that you've probably got an Aptiva 2137 EQ2, the mainboard for which has a page at www.pc.ibm.com/qtechinfo/PMYS-3LLS5T.html . Four ISA slots, three PCI, one AMC connector of no use to you at all, and no AGP. Hence, nowhere to put an AGP graphics card.

Game over, thank you for playing.

If you want to upgrade the graphics adapter, you'll need a PCI graphics card. Remember, kids, that even if your name-brand computer says it's got "AGP graphics", that doesn't mean it's got an AGP slot. It probably has, but it may have an AGP graphics adapter integrated into the motherboard, and no slot for a better one. Check your manual.

Name Brand Computers: Just Say No.

MYSTIC NUMBERS

Q> I have recently put Winamp v2.6 on my system. I have a question about the Equalizer. What do the

numbers across the bottom mean (60, 170, 310, 600, 1k, 3k, 6k, 12k, 14k, 16k)? And how do they affect the music that is being played?

Daniel Pleasance

A> The graphic equaliser (or EQ) is like a multi-channel tone control. Instead of just having bass and treble, you've got multiple frequency bands you can boost or cut independently. The numbers indicate the centre frequency for each band - 60 Hertz (Hz, cycles per second), 170Hz, 310Hz, and so on up to 16kHz, which is 16,000Hz. Each octave is a doubling of frequency, so a 3kHz tone is one octave lower than a 6kHz one.

For reference, the average bass drum thud is about 60Hz, and the standard tuning for the musical note A that lies in the middle of a piano keyboard is 440Hz.

Graphic equalisers in hi-fi systems work exactly the same way as the "virtual" one in Winamp. They're meant to be used to tailor the response of the system to match the room it's in and the quirks of the speakers; the more bands they have, the better they are at it. But most people just use them as simple tone controls, though.


WHAT TO BUY, WHAT TO BUY...

I know the answer for this question is subjective, but I would value your opinion. My system is a Celeron 333 with 96MB of RAM and a Diamond Monster Fusion (16MB Voodoo Banshee) graphics card. The dilemma is that my 15" monitor has just died (Hooray!). I have a tight computer budget but can stretch to about $700.

Do I:

The Asus AGP-V7100/2VID, the dual-monitor version of the plain V7100
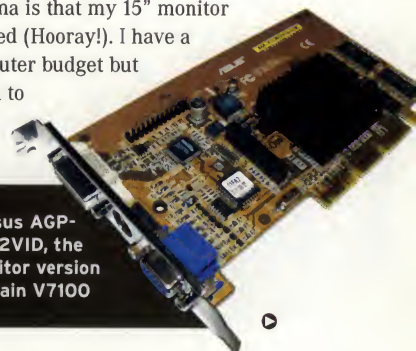
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Q POLYPROCESSULAR COMPUTING...

Two years ago, back when I lived in Texas, my parents bought a Hewlett Packard Pavilion 4440. The computer originally came with an AMD K6 2/333 processor, 15" monitor, 64MB SDRAM shared memory architecture, 4.3GB Hard Drive, 32x max speed CD-ROM, and a 56Kbps modem.

Here in Australia, we decided to upgrade the computer at the local Harvey Norman computer centre. We put in a Maxi Gamer Cougar PCI (TNT2-M64), a Microsoft Optical Mouse, an Acer internal CD-RW(8x4x32), and a new 15GB hard drive. Due to physical size, the original hard drive was removed.

We get the computer back from the store, and everything is working fine. Well when I run Homeworld with 1024x768 resolution, full textures, and full effects the screen starts jumping.

The K6-2. It looks like one processor, because it is one.

So I put it to 640x480, low textures, and low effects, and it still jumps. I even played a Ground Control demo, and I couldn't put the view distance very far before the game became unplayable. I think our problem is with the RAM. I think the "2/" means there are two 333 processors, so I am guessing that means its only 32MB of RAM per processor.

My question is, what can we do with the second processor? If we add RAM to one processor, will it negatively affect the other processor?

Michael Beasley

A

You started well there, Michael, but then you had a little trip into the high-tech equivalent of medieval cosmology, I am afraid.

The K6-2 is just the second version of the K6, which was AMD's competition for the old Socket 7 Pentium - the massmarket Intel CPU before the Pentium II. You have got just the one CPU in your computer, and it's on a motherboard which can also accept a Pentium, Pentium MMX (the somewhat enhanced late-model version of the Pentium) or K6-III - the next evolution again of the K6 design.

Even if you *do* have a dual CPU computer - which, if you're running a Socket 7 machine, is just impossible - the system RAM is accessed normally by both CPUs; they don't split it down the middle. There are multiprocessing architectures that don't work that way - more serious and expensive ones - but the Symmetric Multiprocessing (SMP) that IBM-compatible multi-CPU boxes perform has a shared memory pool.

The Guillemot Maxi Gamer Cougar you're running shouldn't be the limiting factor; TNT2 M64 cards aren't anything exciting in the speed department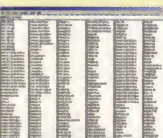 these days, but neither are they rubbish. Yours should have 32MB of graphics memory, which is certainly adequate for the games you are playing.

The amount of RAM you have *may* be the problem. 64MB Win95, Win98 or WinME computers (which, by the way, *can't* use more than one CPU; if you have got a dual-CPU motherboard, the second processor will just sit there unused when you are running these operating systems) certainly can choke on more demanding games. 128MB is better.

Your CPU speed may also be a problem. A 333MHz K6-2 is only about as fast as a similarly clocked Pentium II or Celeron, and the slowest Celeron most places are selling as I write this is 633MHz. 3D games ask a lot of the CPU; if your processor can't cut it, your gameplay will be crummy.

The Pavilion 4440 is a small-box machine with limited expansion capabilities, but it's got two RAM slots that take standard SDRAM DIMMS, so you should just be able to buy another 64 or 128MB DIMM and plug it straight in, once you've gone through the somewhat gymnastic box-opening procedure described by HP at http://support.hp.com/showpage/cat _id/30371104/id/bph05294.html . Which also, by the way, tells you how to tell what your current memory configuration is, and whether you have got a slot free.

A] Buy a 19" monitor (Eg. Viewsonic E790 for approx. $700), or
B] Buy a 17" monitor for around $400 and buy something like an Asus V7100 GeForce MX. Is this going to improve my system significantly in performance while I save for the CPU & M/B upgrade, which I would have gone for had my monitor not given up?

R. Schmidli

A I suggest the smaller monitor and the new graphics card. Your 3D game framerate is likely to be CPU-limited most of the time, but an MX board will let you enjoy the same not-so-great frame rates in considerably higher resolutions, and with higher texture detail, and in 32-bit colour. It won't be a huge revelation, but you'll like it.

Or, of course, you could get a 17" screen and no new graphics card, and just keep saving for a new CPU and graphics card together. The longer you wait, the less a given performance level will cost, but monitor prices don't fall nearly as fast as prices for most other components.

Q OUT, DAMNED PROFILE!
I have a nuisance more than a problem. It's about my computer booting up. Every time I boot up I get this message:
"CMOS checksum error - Defaults loaded"
"CMOS battery failed"

And then it tells me to hit F1 to continue so I do. After I get into Windows my clock has been reset back to 1980, which really bugs me. So can you help out?

Also, how do you get rid of Windows user profiles, because my sister set one up and it's now more of a pain than a help.

Mr C

A This'll amaze you all, I know, but when your computer tells you that your CMOS battery has failed, it's often because... your CMOS battery has failed.

The CMOS battery is what maintains the BIOS setup data, including, as you noticed, the clock. Lose the CMOS memory contents and your computer's motherboard goes back to default settings, including setting the system clock to the "epoch" - the time from which the clock counts. All computer clocks count in "ticks" since the epoch, and ordinary PCs have no way to automatically tell what time it is, other than the CMOS clock.

In the olden days, losing CMOS power was a lot more annoying, because hard drive settings (among other things) were also stored in the CMOS memory. Lose the memory, and your computer lost all of its drives. Nowadays, the default settings plus

auto-detection mean the machine will still start up.

CMOS batteries come in different flavours, and all of them generally last for at least a few years. Some motherboards have a rechargeable battery, which charges when the computer is on, and is often soldered to the motherboard. It's not hard for anybody who can use a soldering iron to replace it. Most recent machines have a non-rechargeable lithium battery; they used to be large-ish soldered-on units, but nowadays they're usually an easy to replace button cell.

When the computer is on, the battery doesn't need to provide power to maintain the CMOS memory. Many recent computers also maintain CMOS memory even when the PC is off, as long as it's plugged in and turned on at the wall socket.

So your problem is probably a dead CMOS battery - it might be a bad battery contact or broken motherboard trace, but the battery itself is most likely to be the culprit.

Regarding your removing-profiles question - disabling profiles is easy. Actually removing the ability for a user who *had* a profile to log in and use it again is slightly trickier. I could explain the Registry fiddling needed, but Microsoft have already done it for me, at http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q156/8/26.ASP

Q YOU'VE SEEN ONE, YOU'VE SEEN 'EM ALL...
I'm thinking of purchasing a new videocard for my computer, and had my eye on a GeForce2. The problem is I look in the paper and there's all different "brands" being sold. I mean there's Asus, Creative and Jaton just to name a few.

My computer is a PII-400 with 192Mb RAM, with a 15 inch monitor. I read somewhere (probably in your magazine) that there's not much point getting a GTS card as the MX version will pretty much do the same job on a 15 inch monitor. So I am looking for a GeForce2 MX card, but because of the variety of brands I need your advice about the differences and which one you think is the best.

Jeza Tang

A There's really no difference to speak of in manufacturing quality between expensive brands (Creative, say) and cheap ones (Jaton, Leadtek). The big brands usually come up with cards with a given chipset first, but the MX chipset has been around long enough that pretty much all of the cheap Taiwanese brands that are going to make one, have.

The difference is in the ins and outs the cards provide - flat panel connectors, TwinView so you can connect dual monitors, TV in and out - and in the software bundle, and in the drivers. Every MX card comes with branded drivers from the manufacturer, but any MX board will work with the reference drivers from nvidia.com. It's just fancy extras like TV in and out that *may* misbehave with the reference drivers, but they probably won't. I don't think anybody has done anything too radical with the MX reference design, so the reference drivers should be okay for all of the MX boards out there - certainly for plain gaming and desktop app purposes.

Overclockers like to look for cards with unusually overclockable RAM and big chip coolers (or easily removed chip coolers, so they can graft on their own giant heat sinks...), but the difference between the worst and the best overclockability is pretty minuscule, if you ask me.

So if a plain VGA out is fine and you don't really care about TV in and out and all that sort of stuff (and most people don't), and none of the software bundles excite you enough to pay extra for them (and most of them won't), and you don't get a tingle in your erectile tissue from having a 1% more overclockable card than the guy next door (and if you do, stay away from me), then just buy the cheapest one. Leadtek and Jaton and all the other Golden Epsilon Lucky Dragon sort of manufacturers make some perfectly good video cards, as long as they are making them with well-known chipsets, like the GeForce2 MX.
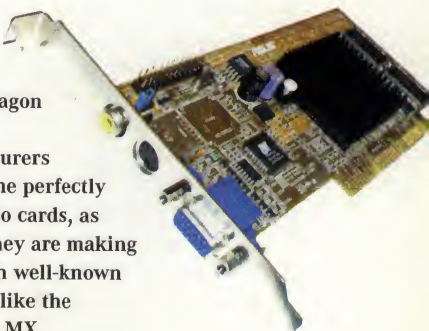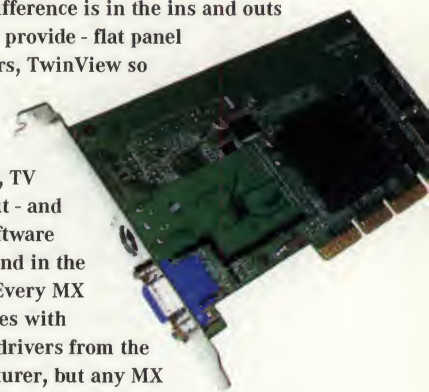
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MADE IN JAPAN

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GIGANTIC MATE!

Hey, what's the most important part of the mag? Come on, it's the CD. This month I've pulled together a beaut collection of demos and utilities, including Giants, fully the most awesome game I've played. Also have a look at Nascar 4, because if you drive like me, this is the racing game for you. I also know you people love that Zeus game, so I've packed in heaps of maps and also an editor. Then there's NBA Live 2001 for that weird mob who like to get outdoors and run around, and heaps more. Fully awesome!

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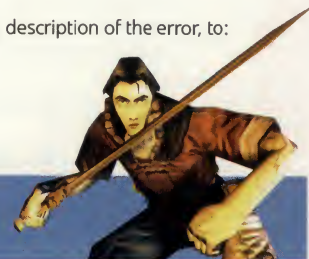
DEMOS CD1

BATTLE FOR NABOO

LucasArts presents a demo of their Action/Flight game demo of Star Wars: Battle for Naboo. Fly through one huge level of this action packed game blasting and fighting your way to the end.

EVIL ISLANDS

From the creators of the Rage of Mages series comes Evil Islands: Curse of the Lost Souls, where you play as a hero in the mysterious world of Allods and take on non-linear quests in a rich, fully 3D complex fantasy world.

HIRED TEAM TRIAL

Hired Team: Trial is multiplayer 3D-shooter where you are competing with other candidates to join Hired Team. Your objective is to kill all other candidates without any pity before they gang up on you.

SPACE TRIPPER

Space Tripper is an experience of pure arcade bliss. There's no story, no background, no explanation. Just you and your little fighter ship, blazing your way through 14 arenas full of weird and wonderful enemies that just beg to be blasted.

FATE OF THE DRAGON

Plot and war against your friends online as a great warlord of ancient China in this fantastic strategy title by Eidos. After the fall of the Eastern Han Dynasty, it's up to you as one of the three warlords to reunify China under your rule.

SUMMONER

Summoner is a dark fantasy role-playing game with an original way of combat and fighting styles by summoning creatures and demons to your aid, and an in-depth, dramatic storyline that has "sleeper-hit" written all over it.

F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP

Participate in one of the most outstanding championships of the world! F1 Racing Championship is the most realistic and exciting simulation ever published and is officially licenced.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT MOVIE

Operation FlashPoint is a tactical combat action war game. It offers the player an unprecedented freedom of action integrating command of large squads and use of any available vehicles with total immersion. This preview is small but show's you what to expect.

TROPICO MOVIE

As the newly installed dictator of an obscure Caribbean island, build a path of progress for a nation mired in poverty, civil unrest and infighting. Oh, and uhh… stash a few million in your Swiss bank account just in case you need to take early retirement.

NEOCRON MOVIE

Neocron is an online multiplayer game with a cyberpunk theme developed by Reakktor Media. It mixes the role playing aspects of a Multi-User Dungeon(MUD) and the action elements and interface of a First Person Shooter(FPS) game.

G FORCE 3 DOOM MOVIE

This is footage of the new GeForce 3 from MacWorld 2001 in Tokyo. Two presentations showing off the power of the GeForce 3 are included, one being the new game engine by id Software and a sneak peek at some of the next DOOM game.

SPOTLIGHT CD1

GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO

There aren't enough fun games these days. Modern games are artistically elegant, and tell compelling stories, and immerse the gamer in fully detailed alternate worlds, but it's been a long time since a game made us grin from the sheer coolness of it. That is, until now… Giant's is here and it's gonna be huge. Check out this exclusive demo from Interplay!

GAMEPLAY CD1

COMMAND & CONQUER RED ALERT 2 PATCH V1.004
Latest Red Alert 2 patch featuring many bug fixes including the dreaded Terror Drone / Unpacking MCV problem that made games never end.

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 SPECIAL MISSION CAMPAIGN
Jorge Alsina and Joe Amodea have released a special mission campaign for Combat Flight Simulator 2.It contains highly detailed aircraft featuring full animations, a functioning virtual cockpit, with balanced and authentic flight dynamics and damage profiles.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT MEDIEVAL CAPTURE THE FLAG MAP
One of the better Unreal Tournament maps we've had pleasure to play. Get your mate's linked up and enjoy this fine capture the flag map from Dj Carey.

MECH WARRIOR 4 MULTIPLAYER MAP
Microsoft bring you ground pounding Mech Warrior 4 fans a new multiplayer map. With medium sized mountains, this open arctic evironment supports different game modes with up to four teams. Get ready to hit that drop zone for some fierce action.

WINDOWS DETONATOR 3 VIDEO DRIVERS
Grab NVIDIA's latest drivers to increase it's power by up to 50% on the GeForce, GeForce2, Quadro, and Quadro2 family of graphic accelerators. These are also useful for the TNT, TNT2, and Vanta cards utilizing the unified driver architecture by NVIDIA.

DIRECT X8.0A
The latest Microsoft DirectX 8.0 drivers for Windows 9x/SE/ME. This latest version of DirectX offers updated graphics, faster frame rates, and support for massively multiplayer games.

DEMOS CD1 CONTROLS

Evil Islands
Day 4, 1.07
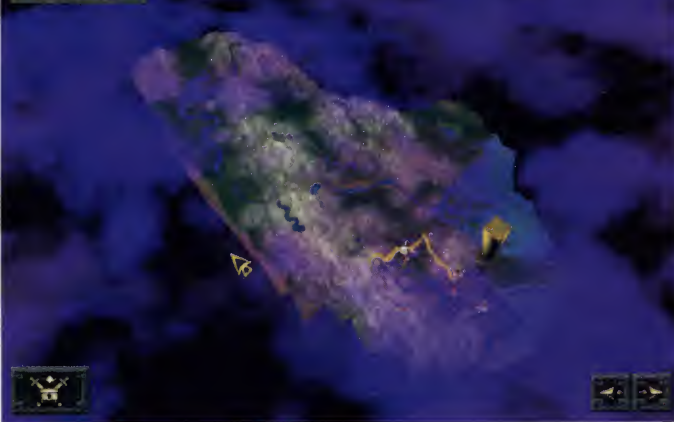
GIANTS
Meccaryns
Look up/down, Turn left/right - Mouse
Run Forward - W
Run Backward - S
Run Left - A
Run Right - D
Use Weapon/Attack - Left mouse
Special Camera - F
Toggle First Person - R
Zoom Mode - E
Zoom In - Z
Map Mode - C
Activate Back Item - Left Shift
Activate Party House Item - X
Cycle Weapon Forward - Q
Cycle Weapon Backward - Tab
Give Health - H
Throw Grenade - G
Throw Mine - B
Use Flare - V
Thrust - Right mouse

Nitro - Space bar
Disciple Mode - Left Control
Disciple Attack - Left mouse
Disciple Recall - 2
Disciple Goto - Right mouse
Drop Smartie/Backpack item - B'space
Drop Current Weapon - J
Gyrochopter Keys
Fly Forward - W
Fly Left - A
Fly Right - D
Thrust - Right mouse
Attack/Use Machinegun - Left mouse
Use Millennium Cannon - G

BATTLE FOR NABOO
Keyboard Settings
Switch View - `
Brake - s
Thrust - w
Fire Blasters - Space
Fire Secondary - Left Alt

Roll - e
Tight Turn - Right Ctrl
Turn Left - Left Arrow
Turn Right - Right Arrow
Craft Up - Up Arrow
Craft Down - Down Arrow
Mouse Settings
Brake = Button 3
Fire Blasters = Button 1
Fire Secondary = Button 2
Pitch Up/Down = Y Axis
Turn Left/Right = X Axis

HIRED TEAM TRIAL
Move Forward - w or up arrow
Move Back - s or down arrow
Strafe Left - a
Strafe Right - d
Up - z
Down - x
Look Up - r
Look Down - f
Turn Left - left arrow
Turn Right - right arrow
Jump - space
Strafe - alt
Run/walk - shift
fire weapons - control / left button
select weapons - 1 through 9
previous weapon - wheel down
next weapon - wheel up
best - e
scale - v
use - enter
score - tab
talk - y

EVIL ISLANDS
Select Character - F1-F3
Select All Characters - F4

Follow Character - F
Take, Steal, Use - S
Aggressive/Defensive toggle - A
Run - Z
Walk - X
Sneak - C
Crawl - V
Select Weapon 1 - Q
Select Weapon 2 - W
Select Weapon 3 - E
Select Weapon 4 - R
Use Quick Item 1 - P
Use Quick Item 2 - O
Use Quick Item 3 - I
Use Quick Item 4 - U
Get Spells 1 to 8 - 1 through to 8
Aim at head - num 8
Aim at body - num 5
Aim at right leg - num 1
Aim at left leg - num 3
Aim at right arm - num 4
Aim at left arm - num 6

SUMMONER
Controls
You can move your main character in one of two ways. You can left-click where you would like you character to move to or you can left-click and hold and the your character will follow your mouse cursor.

You can switch between different party members simply by clicking on the corresponding portrait or by pressing "Tab" to cycle through the entire party. You can target enemies by highlighting them with the mouse cursor and then left-clicking on the selected target. Your characters will then attack and defend on their own.

DEMOS CD2

Nascar 4

Desperados

NBA Live 2001

Sudden Strike

Battle Isle

DESPERADOS

Thanks to Ozisoft for this exclusive Desperado's demo. It's sure to please fans of games like Commandos. Desperados puts you in the shoes of legendary western hero John Cooper and his team as they take on the ultra-villain El Diablo (not to be confused with Diablo, who resides a little farther south). The full version of the game should be hitting the shelves as we speak. Go get em cowboy...

HIGH HEAT
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2002

Wow, we almost made a whole year without a baseball game and now we have two on one CD. Actually, we're trying to work out which Baseball demo is better so we thought we'll let you decide... Batter up!

TRIPLE PLAY BASEBALL

The hardest-hitting baseball game for your PC is back. Triple Play Baseball is fully updated with current stats, rosters and stadiums, including Miller Park in Milwaukee and PNC Park in Pittsburgh.

NBA LIVE 2001

Think you can run the rock well enough to hang with the best? Now you can hook up with other virtual hoopsters around the globe to find out who's got the most game. High-flying dunks, crossover dribbles, and blocked shots that land in the fourth row, it's all here...

SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike is set in World War II and offers carefully planned Russian,

German, French, American and British missions. We also included the multi-player demo for those of you with online friends.

NASCAR 4

This is the long awaited demo of NASCAR Racing 4, brought to us by Papyrus. Get behind the wheel of powerful stock cars and race your way to victory and the checkered flag.

BATTLE ISLE
ANDOSIA WAR

Battle Isle: Andosia War is Blue Byte's fifth launch into the universe of the classic Battle Isle series. The Battle Isle games rank among the milestones of turn-based strategy games so if you haven't played one yet you are definitely missing out.

CHOPPER

Chopper is a fast paced action game similar to Choplifter and Desert Strike. Well worth checking out...

DEMOS CD2 CONTROLS

Sudden Strike

DESPERADOS

+/- - zoom in/out
Arrow keys - scroll map
m - open or close mini map
1-6 - toggle different characters
Shift + 1-6 - select multiple characters
a - select all characters
d - deselect all character
Shift + right-click on portrait - deselect
a specific character
c - crouch
s - stand up
Shift + left-click - go behind building
g, h, j, k ,l - toggle between the five
actions for a selected charactor
Ctrl - hold down to move forward with
weapon aimed

NBA Live 2001

NBA LIVE 2001
Mouse controls action
Cursors control movement

SUDDEN STRIKE
Left mouse button - Highlight
units
Left double click - Highlight
all units of the same type
Right mouse button - Move
highlighted units
(hold position)
Right mouse button + Ctrl - Collect

highlighted units
(assemble in one point)
Right mouse button + Shift -
Save order
Ctrl + 0-9 - Save selection
0-9 - Restore selection
Press 0-9 quickly, twice - Focus on
selected units
F1 - Display statistics
F5 - No independent movement
(hold move)
F6 - No independent firing (hold fire)
Pause - Pause/continue game

(orders can still be given while game
is paused)
Tab - Air support
M - Move/drop mines
A - Attack
R - Assault/attack run
F - Artillery/long range fire
G - Get mines
T - Turn gun
U - Unload
B - Build
L - Load
Space - Stop

GAMEPLAY CD2

COMMAND & CONQUER RED ALERT MAP PACKS
Yeah, we know we brought you a nice map pack last month. Here's some more for you all packed into one nice zip. Enjoy and blow the world up a few times for the PC PowerPlay team.

HALF-LIFE OUNTERSTRIKE MOD V71.10
Latest Counterstrike mod for Half-life. It's new, it's hot, you should have some fun with it.

DEUS EX SDK
Here is the latest updated SDK that you mod developers will need with the new patches. Ease of use and compatibility have been improved

with the update and allows users to create their own missions, maps and conversations.

DEUS EX MULTIPLAYER PATCH
This is the latest patch for multiplayer game play. It will work for any

previous version of the game and includes a slew of great fixes that you can read about in more info. There is no need to get the single player patch also since all of their fixes are included in this file.

ZEUS MASTER OF OLYMPUS ENHANCMENT PACK
Players with the latest city-building game Zeus: Master of Olympus can, for the first time, create their own mythical tales with the new Zeus Adventure Editor. It also contains a new adventure that expands the storyline in the original game to provide even more city-building fun.

NOLF MAP PACK #2
This content update adds three deathmatch maps and five assault maps. In order to insure the new maps play as intended, you will need to first install the base Update version 1.002 which we also included on the CD.

COMMAND & CONQUER WESTWOOD
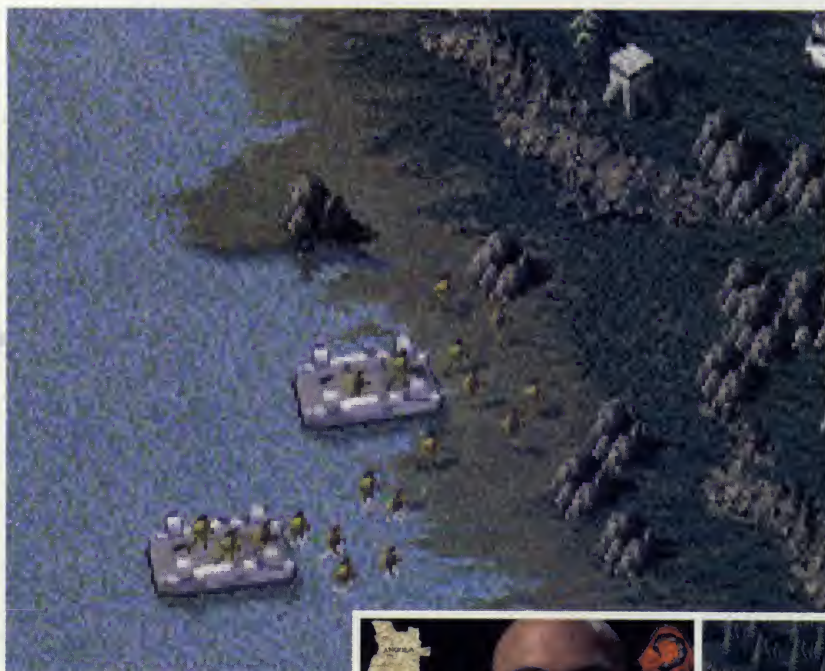
There was always something interesting about the way people played Westwood's groundbreaking RTS opus, Command & Conquer. So interesting, in fact, it could be utilised on family and friends as a personality test of sorts. Consider this: after watching you play, the first thing all of your (once) highly trusted and esteemed friends asked when they took command was, "Which side has those **flamethrower tanks? I totally can't wait to burn some shit up!"? They *could* have played on the side of GDI and defended world peace and good living, but no, they liked to torch people to death.**
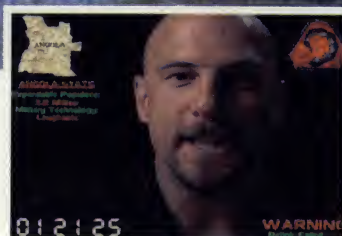
But at any rate and with all psychological undertones aside, the central fact remains: C&C was and still is a great game. While not in the slightest revolutionary nor, indeed, even original (C&C was built on the engine of another Westwood classic, Dune II), what this strategy gem did for the gaming community in general is phenomenal. Sure it brought a great level of mainstream attention and respect to the strategy genre as a whole, with its unexpectedly fast pace and furious multiplayer facets, but it also raised the bar on an oft overlooked yet monumentally important aspect of modern video games: FMV.

Despite the hammy acting, the FMV in C&C was visually astounding. One would often find oneself desperately trying to finish missions as quickly as possible as to get the next fix of ultra impressive full-motion splendour awaiting upon success. It was really that good (*Well, almost - Ed*). Before C&C, FMV was a grainy, blurry poorly acted mess. After it, FMV was still poorly acted, but hey, it sure looked a lot more purty.

In fact, by looking at the highly polished FMV of C&C, it is possible to draw conclusions as to why the game is such a classic as a whole. Sure, we'd seen it all before - the FMV, the play mechanic etc - but we *hadn't* seen the absolutely astounding degree to which Westwood had improved these aspects. Never before was strategy so fun, so furious and so exceptionally refined.
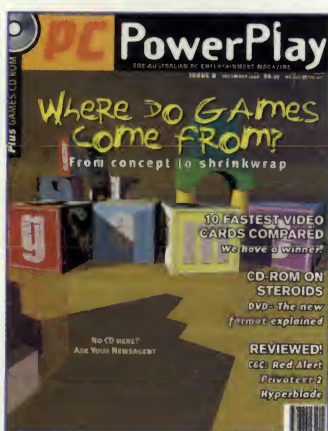
REVIEWS
C & C: Red Alert (97%)
Privateer 2 (89%)
Hyperblade (89%)

THE ARCHIVE
FOUR YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

PCPP#8   DECEMBER 1996
With one of our cutest, if not disturbingly bizarre, covers we asked the question that none of your probably had on your lips, but still wanted answered anyway: "Where do games come from?" If you were one of the smart arses who immediately answered 'the shop' and then smugly skipped over the article, then suck it. You missed out on a great feature that systematically delved headfirst into the software development and publishing industry and came up with all the answers we were craving. Except for the one about what sort of person would write the horrid script in 7th Guest. That will never be answered.

And while we are speaking about despicable scripts, why not talk about the review of Red Alert that also happened to feature predominantly in this issue? It garnered a whopping huge 97% from the venerable George Soropos and didn't even need the aid of a fake-breasted Tanya to do so! Of course, this is all very timely considering the imminent release of Renegade and the distinct Command & Conquer flavour that this issue has adopted and we're sure, if one tried hard enough, it would be possible to extract some kind of 'circle of life' metaphor from all this. But don't bother. Just keep reading the mag.

> *"As a special introductory offer, PCPP readers can get 2 months unlimited access to The Core for half price!"*
> - Us, on page 10. Does anyone know what on earth The Core was?

VIRTUAGNOME

"**T**here's nothing like a quiet spot of gardening." So says Ethel Barrowturf, CEO and lead programmer of Raisin Ranch Interactive, a new games development company operating out of an ancient house in Quirindi, NSW.

The boots and I are standing ankle deep in fresh blood'n'bone as Ethel and 3D modeller Beatrice Bulbmention (or Aunt Bea, as she prefers) tend their impressive three-quarter acre garden and discuss their debut title VirtuaGnome.

"As gamers and senior citizens, we feel the current range of titles don't cater for our needs or interests," explains Aunt Bea, "so we started Raisin Ranch Interactive to develop games for older gamers."

"Our titles are more intellectual than visceral," adds Ethel, "because we tend to find 'twitch' games such as Q3A and UT are simply far too easy for us to master."

Aunt Bea checks her silver bun, adjusts her lacy gardening apron, and while trowelling vigorously casually mentions, "You may have encountered me on some of the Q3A servers. I go by the tag {XLR8~anyL8}. I'm NSW Generic-Wake-Up-Drink Champion, you know"

"Anyway," says Ethel, "we've begun development on our first title, which will accurately simulate all aspects of gardening." She goes on to explain that VirtuaGnome will place the player on an empty plot of land, tasked with transforming it into a viable and flourishing garden.

"There will be a very strong focus on niggling little weeding tasks and also the spreading of fertiliser," explains Ethel. "And the player will have to overcome such problems as overly acidic soil, various pests including those big green grasshoppers that appear to vomit soy sauce when you touch them, and also a fair bit of financial management, you know, when buying bulbs and things."

"There will be a fully simulated nursery in the game," Aunt Bea is quick to add, "where you will be able to buy packets of seeds and haggle with the strange hippy woman who runs the place. Plus you can point and giggle at the penises on the little statues of Cupid."

Raisin Ranch also claims an accurate weather system will be included in the game, with rain, drought, hail, snow and flaming meteorites. As we pause for morning tea - Tim Tams and Earl Gray in a lovely little Gazebo - Aunt Bea briefly outlines the weapons that will make it into the final game.

"No question about the rocket launcher," she says enthusiastically, "and the railgun too, those are my favourites from Q3A. Did I ever tell you about the time I got 100 frags in ten minutes on the Longest Yard? That's ten frags a minute, you know. It was the summer of 2000, and I recall I had just done my hair…"

"There will also be a spray gun," interrupts Ethel with a brief frown at her colleague, "which will contain various pesticides. Some will be highly acidic. We've done a lot of work on a realistic acid-eating-away-the-face-of-your-nosy-neighbour animation."

"Paul Steed is my hero," says Aunt Bea unexpectedly.

Truly a title to look out for, older gamers can expect to see VirtuaGnome on the shelves in Q2 2002. Incidentally, if you're ever in Tamworth, stay at the Golden Guitar Motor Inn. It's wild.

GNOME BENCHMARKING

Deep in the PCPP Tech Bunker the boots and I ran a set of specially formulated benchmarks to gauge the performance of our office gnome, Prumpy. First, we installed him on an ASUS A7V133 board along with 512Mb of PC-133 SDRAM and a Global Win FOP38 cooling fan. We started Prumpy through a vigorous workout, including a 76-minute looping 3DMark2000 benchmark to test Direct3D performance. We tested at 11am when the ambient temperature was 28 degrees, and we also tested at 12 midnight when it was only 19 degrees. We then tried him out in a specially designed Yellow Boots Q3A demo (using point-release 1.27 of course) and then overclocked his FSB to 123MHz and monitored any temperature fluctuations via the BIOS and also using ASUSProbe. We also attached a probe to his left elbow using a combination of Artic Silver II thermal paste and sticky tape. Then we put him in a bucket of ice water for three hours, thoroughly towelled him dry and then put him in front of the fire. Then we dropped him from a third storey balcony onto cement at 32.6 degrees Centigrade. Ambient temperature was 22 degrees. We did it again at 10pm with a halogen light illuminating the test zone. Then we drove a Mack truck over him, then a Volvo truck, then a city bus. Giants performance was tested with the patch that takes off Delphi's top. After all this we were able to determine that Prumpy is Yellow Boots' HOTTEST MUST-HAVE DREAM HARDWARE OF THE MONTH. Buy him now, at any good nursery.

NEXT MONTH...

• RPG EXTRAVAGANZA!
Insightful eye-opening previews of every RPG expected over the next year. Neverwinter Nights, Pool of Radiance, Diablo 2 addon and more. Also, discover the awful truth that PCPP Editors and Contributors play D&D… and they LIKE IT!
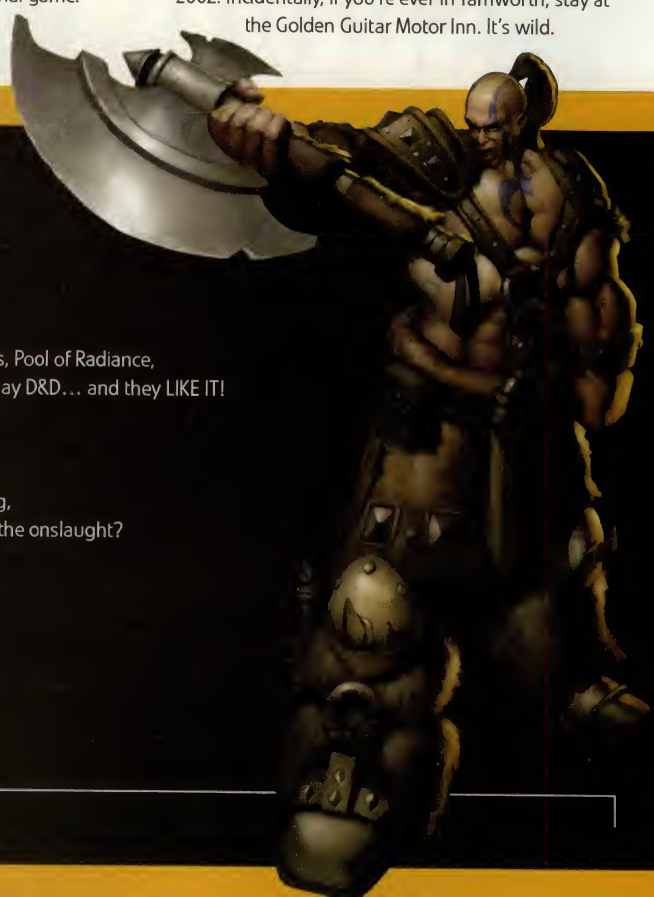
• SOUNDCARD POWERTEST!
From Dolby DTS DVD playback and CD mastering all the way down to making your box go bing, we take a long hard listen to 12 state-of-the-art soundcards. Can the Gametheater withstand the onslaught?

• TOO MANY GAMES TO MENTION!
But we'll have a go anyway: Fallout Tactics, Summoner, Evil Dead, Hostile Waters, Jetfighter IV, Leadfoot, Startopia, The Ward, Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter and more!

PC POWERPLAY #61 - ON SALE APRIL 11, 2001